CSM

POEMS

BOOKS BY
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

Fiction

PARNASSUS ON WHEELS
THE HAUNTED BOOKSHOP
KATHLEEN
TALES FROM A ROLLTOP DESK
WHERE THE BLUE BEGINS
PLEASED TO MEET YOU
PANDORA LIFTS THE LID
(with Don Marquis)
THE ARROW
THUNDER ON THE LEFT
I KNOW A SECRET

Essays

SHANDYGAFF
MINCE PIE
PIPEFULS
PLUM PUDDING
TRAVELS IN PHILADELPHIA
THE POWDER OF SYMPATHY
INWARD HO!
RELIGIO JOURNALISTICI
THE ROMANY STAIN
ESSAYS
OFF THE DEEP END
SEACOAST OF BOHEMIA

Poetry

THE BOWLING GREEN
SONGS FOR A LITTLE HOUSE
THE ROCKING HORSE
HIDE AND SEEK
CHIMNEYSMOKE
PARSON'S PLEASURE
TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE
TOULEMONDE

Plays

ONE-ACT PLAYS

POEMS

By

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

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POEMS

POEMS

PAUMANOK

HOW do men make their words endure
Beyond the night that has no cure,
And so avail them strong and sure
Against the dark to-morrow?
Ask of the poet: he knows best,
Remembering how his hand was pressed
Against the softness of your breast
O lovely lovely Sorrow!

How do we make a garden sweet?
The paths are soft beneath the feet
But ecstasy is incomplete
Still waiting for to-morrow—
The linden tree let slip her seed,
In every bush the birds agreed
But I perceived my secret need—
I had no pretty Sorrow!

How do we sanctify this place
And fill the naked air with grace
And carve To-day's imperfect face
  Upon the stone To-morrow?
To keep divinities divine
There must be acid in the wine
And so, to make this place a shrine
  Give room to tender Sorrow!

Let Reason, like the night-owl, pass
And cast his feather on the grass:
I'll find it there, and raise my glass
  And honor him—to-morrow.
To-night is Beauty to be sought—
She is a woman, to be taught;
To me, and me alone, she brought
  The perfect gift of Sorrow.

A LETTER, LATE AT NIGHT

Old Goldenheart, the dearest of old dears . . .
(Oldening thee by affection, not by years)
A word with thee,
A word that would like to be
As spacious and as free
As this December night of naked sky
Where one man lays his hand on other, to cry
"I love thee, love thee, O thou blest old fool!"

Well-mingled spirit, rich with the savoury earth
Of humour; poet, jester of fecund mirth
So masterfully simple that it shows
No minim speck of sham, pretence, or pose—
So lit and winged with antic mimicry
That conies of the upper cults, or casuals of the press
Are scarcely competent to guess
Behind that gusty offhand ribaldry
The full control and pressure of great art—
Satire so waggishly disguised
Its victims would have been surprised
To know themselves were being satirized—
Satire that loved them even while it skinned them,
And chloroformed them first, before it pinned them. . . .

Old Goldenheart! A reverent doubtful spirit
And opal-minded, where an inward red
Burns in the milk and moonlight of the gem—
Humble and defiant, as all men are,
(Falling, as we do, from star to star),
Droll tragedian, lip pouted to consider
Life's technicals, so crooked and so slidder,
With such strange prizes for the highest bidder—
Old curly cherub, with the poker face, not always shaven,
But with such prankish pensiveness engraven,

You, in an age when almost everyone is clever
Never declined—No, never—
Into the easy triumphs of the smart,
Old Goldenheart.

So now, my dear, your hand. . . .
This is queer comfort; but you'll understand.
Now, in her weaving as it moves and shifts
Life slogs you the most terrible of her gifts;
And Chance, the wanton slattern,
In her bright deadly pattern, strange design,
(Spinning a greater artist, it may be)
Slashes her cruellest vivid twine,
The changeful silk of needless tragedy.
And we can guess
How one who laboured patiently and sore
Building up his honourable store
Of happiness and refuge, secret peace,
Then sees it crash about him—how once more
The old intolerable loneliness
Darkens round him again; and he is tired, tired,
And everything is barren that he desired.
For, when the great clutch of Life takes us by the nape
Forcing us to our knees
There is no ease and no escape
Save in that terrible noble loneliness
Where man may fully, unshamefully confess
His miserable stress.

So, some day, with us all:
Then, even in the numbness, dizziness,
Going about our estrangèd pitiful busyness
The disciplined grin, the tittles of the day
Are suddenly poised on blackness, unbelief,
And we turn eyes away from small familiar things,
Their thousand little stings.
Yet this you shall recall—
We others, too,
Require your comfort, strength more than our own
That comes to us from you: since he alone
Can comfort, who himself has known
Horror and sickening ironies and pain.
Your honour, annealed in fire,
We also may require.

And all, all poets who have gone before
Are surely your brothers now.
Why I can see Chaucer coming in at the door,
I can see just how
He'd greet you, and the darling twinkled way
He'd say some trivial casual tendermost thing
As he, he only, could
(Something not all would relish; but you would)
And others who understood—
Sam Clemens, Goldsmith, Lamb . . . or even Swift.
My dear old fellow, will
You remember than Dan Chaucer loves you still?

Life, Goldenheart, my old,
Is a tale that is told,
But only told in part. A dream once came to me
Of a grassy headland by the sea
And a lonely shuttered house, shaken with wind:
A house most strangely wistful, locked, deserted,
Yet, I firmly knew, could I win inside
There would be consolations long denied;
But every time I tried
To approach those blistered windows, fierce concerted
Apparitions, faces not quite human, grinned
And mocked and peeped round corners. Blusters of wind
Banged and clapped. There were fearful cries
Disgusting to the soul, and shrieks of glee.
I cursed and went.
Yet . . . there's a sour pride
In knowing Life must play such idiot pranks
Hoping to terrorize.

Ah, Goldenheart, I think that those inherit
The bitter coronal, who can most finely wear it:
Shuddering and abased,
But not disgraced;
Proud, proud to have outfaced
The champion stroke, the merciless dirty wit
Of the Player Opposite.
And honour, wine and sunlight yet remain,
Clean wind and washing rain,

And that gigantic mirth that men so need,
And loneliness indeed,
Loneliness, which I rate high.
And the love of friends,
And by and by
Silence, the end of ends.

CURFEW SONG

(To an old Burgundian music)

Candle-flame leans toward the chimney
  And the hearthfire toward the star—
Every fiery bit of burning
  Yearns where greater blazes are.
Yet must every shining ember
Sparkling high or low, remember
All that's tinder comes to cinder,
  Yellow suns burn through and char—
Lights of earth, Oh be not fretful:
Only ask that sweet forgetful
  Darkness fold us, near and far.

Dowse the taper softly, softly
  Lest the little flame take fright—
Crown him with this cap of folly,
  Dancing clown of candle-light.
Now let every weary spirit
Warmth of bed and sleep inherit

And in drowsing think of rousing
To a morning calm and bright—
Thankful for the perfect blessing
Of a future there's no guessing:
So, Messieurs, Mesdames—Good-Night!

SIR KENELM TO THE LADY VENETIA

(1624)

Hold high your gallant head
Because I love you:
But nothing, when we're dead,
Can I have of you.

So with my wholesome lust
I will acquaint you
And with what words I must
My picture paint you:

My folly—and my wit
That marked and found you,
My arms that quaintly fit
When they're around you.

Dear trouble, dark delight
Since first I met you—
Oh now, for peace to-night
Let me forget you.

No woman ever bred
  Can rise above you:
Hold high your gallant head
  Because I love you!

OF A CHILD THAT HAD FEVER

I bid you, mock not Eros
  Lest Eros mock with you.
His is a hot distemper
  That hath no feverfew.

Love, like a child in sickness,
  Brilliant, languid, still,
In fiery weakness lying,
  Accepts, and hath no will.

See, in that warm dispassion
  Less grievance than surprise,
And pitiable brightness
  In his poor wondering eyes.

Oh delicate heat and madness,
  Oh lust unnerved and faint:
Sparkling in veins and fibres,
  Division and attaint!

I bid you, mock not Eros;
He knows not doubt or shame,
And, unaware of proverbs,
The burnt child craves the flame.

PARSONS' PLEASURE

To breed a poet, let him grow
First, settled in one place, to know
One coign of ground pluperfectly;
Until, subconscious and instinct,
Familiar sights and sounds are linked:
Her bend of soil, her smell of air
Bottom the clearness of his mind,
Make a deep shining there, and pass
To inmost in; as mercury behind
A lucid pane, makes looking-glass—
It matters very little where:
His heart has taken quickroot there.

Heart planted thus, then let him be
Tossed and transported to and fro;
Angered, frightened: ecstasy
And idiot anguish, ribald mirth,
Shall salt him to the carnal earth.
Bravely elated, let him vex
Inscrutables—viz., God or sex—
(A subject that I will not touch:
I'd say too little, or too much.)

Two breeding places I have known
Where germinal my heart was sown;
Two places from which I inherit
The present business of my spirit:
Haverford, Oxford, quietly
May make a poet out of me.

O Quaker college! every tree,
Each slope and hollow of her lawn,
How inerasably is drawn
Upon my tender memory.
There, where the broad green cricket field
Lies like a polished convex shield
The breakfast light, on those flat curves,
Gilds something brighter than mere turves!
There's mystic pureness in her scene:
Life indescribably serene
Befits the calmest of all creeds.
What was her placid secret? Was it
The dropping flit of maple seeds
(Coat-hangers for a fairy's closet),
The darkly-lustred copper-beeches,
And through the room where GUMMERE teaches
Sweet grassy air of May astir,
The lawnmower's drowsy turning whirr,
The hourly flux of feet along the ways . . .

Or leafsmoke of mild autumn days,
The campus dimmed in pungent haze;

Beyond the opal western hill
Clear *Darby* waters brownly flow
With amberlucent sudden chill:
Roosting warm fence-rails, there beside
The sunny meadow, till we dried—
Then to the griping Cider Mill!
Old FOUNDERS bell, with gentle clang:
Clatter of plates; the songs we sang—
Sweet sentimental, simple youths,
Our notebooks full of harmless truths
(Nor guessed the traps life gets you in,
So much more puzzling than mere sin).

Oxford . . . two rivers and four hills
(*Shotover*, *Wytham*, *Cumnor*, *Boar's*)—
Isis, threshed by rhyming oars;
Cher, in an aisle of trees and meadows
Where willows sieve thin water-shadows,
And, in the dapple, sliding through,
The chuckling punt, the still canoe.
Of all the rivers that there are,
None so immortal as the Cher!
Wide sunny stretches edged with reeds;
The supper-hampers on the meads;
The tea, brewed with a spirit-lamp;
The cushions, to subfend the damp;
The punt-pole's dripping downward slither,
The lingering dusk of English weather—

But most, of all the mind can treasure,
The swimming pool called PARSONS' PLEASURE.

A greengloom sideloop of the creek,
A sodden place of twilight smell:
Clear dayshine did not often touch
That water; and a mouldy hutch
For the convenience of undressing.
An ancient, far from prepossessing,
Offered uncandid towels (eschewed
By most).
There men's white bodies, nude,
Unconscious, comely, gallant, Greek,
Stretched, tingled cool, shone sleek, lived well
In the one patch where sunwarm fell.
The slow curve of those bodies diving
And, after all these years, surviving
In my mind only: that flash, seen
Against the willows' roofing green
When they were reckless, young, and clean,
That, in my secret mind, must be
Their pitiful immortality.
Indeed, one may so furiously cherish
Moments, that they cannot perish;
And this is not irrelevant:
The poet's reason, which I bade you plant
In one parochial soil, grows fecund
More richly than you reckoned—
Scorns to count first or second

In its general treasury of glee,
And, humbly spored,
Spreads infinite trellis toward
The truth, its only lord.
This, then, be sign and token,
And I have spoken:
Save he has quickened and been moved
By that irrational agonizing fit
That teaches him to love all life, and honour it—
Dreadful tenderness that goes deep, deep,
Like the downward gaze upon a child asleep—
This, if he does not know it,
He is not poet:
He is not poet, for he has not loved.

I ALMOST HAD FORGOTTEN

I almost had forgotten
What lonely midnight meant—
The sky too sweet for sleeping,
With speckle-stars besprent.

I almost had forgotten
The old sweet folly: how
I sat with ink, outwatching
Orion and the Plough.

I almost had forgotten
That love is dearth and pain,
And how the body's vigil
Is goaded by the brain.

I almost had forgotten
That words were made for rhyme:
And yet how well I knew it—
Once upon a time!

SO THIS IS ARDEN

As You Like It, Act IV, Scene 2½

[*Another part of the forest. Enter Jaques and Touchstone*]

Touch. So this is Arden.

Jaq. You like it not, motley?

Touch. A pleasant place for coupling. Truly, sir, the whole forest is a very buzz of Hymen. Where pigeons, conies, fieldmice, and such small mortals are so public in gallantry, one cannot defend our young folk their appetites. Your forests are plaguey resort for warm blood, sirrah.

Jaq. Even the fool is tangible, I'll warrant. Aye, fellow, Nature is not less wanton than the court; only, less shameful.

Here is the whole rich world in microcosm—
Philosophers, retainers, lovers, fools,
Sylvestered in this twinkling chequered sunlight,
This flow of nimble air, that sharps the wits
And makes a man fear nothing, only death.

Touch. It sharps the entrails too. One commodity wants notably in your arcady; to wit, hot-cooked victual. I am come to a time of life when I think more of meat than of mating. Maids in love are seemly to ramble withal; but let me eat with gentry. Ods gust, I doubt I have had one plenipotentiary fillpaunch since we erred from court.

Jaq. Your Ganymede is not apt at forage? Love and a whimper of verses, stout fool, are trencher enow for a peaking stomach.

Touch. A handful of herbs and sallets may cram these incapacious younglings. But I'm for venison brisket. Hark ye, Sir Bilious, yestere'en the savour of your Duke's crackling haunches comes me down wind through the forest. I was e'en at some thin pottage of wild gooseberries, concoct by the damsel Aliena.—God 'ield her; she is no kitchener.—There were tears in my nostrils. 'Tis a prickling tender organ, your nostril.

Jaq. Tush, esurient kinsprit, these be sorry tidings. His grace shall mend thy larder. But wouldst thou amplify thy belly rather than thy soul? Give thought to ghostly things.

Touch. Philosophy drips gently from his tongue
Who hath three meals a day in guarantee.
Nay, it was in sheer famine I fell in with the goat-girl Audrey. She sat eating dumplings under a hedge. It was the dumplings I was amorous of: the wench was but perquisite.

Jaq. And stopping her mouth with a buss, pilfered her provision.

Touch. Inexact, but 'twill serve as narrative.

Jaq. Ah, Sir Fool, to kiss with thy mouth full—'twas not courtly.

Touch. She kissed, while I did eat.

Jaq. Mayhap 'tis lean diet, not mere Cupid,
That makes our frolic youthfuls range and quest.

Touch. Even the love-pricked Orlando, mark you, takes occasion to attend the Duke when dinner-time's toward.

Jaq. 'Tis true. His grace awaits him even now
And irked to find him tardy.

Touch. Cornutations and antlers! Is there an empty place at the Duke's table?

Jaq. Hearken, fool. To fools one may speak sooth.

Beneath thy casual antic of demeanour
I read the well-taught man.—These youths of thine,
This girlish-comely stripling Ganymede,
The nut-brown sister, and Orlando too
(Although the boy is something confident)
Have strangely moved my heart. Young Ganymede
Puts me in mind of one whom once I knew:
The saucy carriage of that wilful head,
The darkly crispèd cropping of the hair—
And forest nights are long for memory.

Touch. Speak not of memory, poor bitter sage.
Fools ne'er forget. 'Tis why men call us fools.

Jaq. How can I tell you shortly what I mean?
Or how, when now I see these brave young hearts
Into life's thickest forest plunging in,
I'd give redemption to be one of them,
First learning the dark beauty of the world.
You spoke of hunger. I was that sad fool
Who thought love hunger only; and thought woman
A kind of sweetmeat; till, on that rich diet
Both mind and body sickened and grew foul.
Would that no other blood might make digression

So truant as mine own. But I misdoubt
The instinct of these jocund foresters,
This tumbling sport, like puppies warmed with play.
I too would carve advertisement on trees
And cry to youth, O tarnish not your gold,
Your perfect coin, the image of the King!
True, to the old, young lust looks always carnal:
We do not know what pretty gay conceit
Ensparkles it and makes it delicate.
Once minds have met upon a certain height,
Body falls in as natural royal bounty,
Or, turning your own word, pure perquisition;
As noble matter-of-course. Sweet tenderness
Perfects the lovely work and makes it sacred
Till every contact of poor human flesh
Grows burning sanctity and innocence.

Touch. These are uneasy matters, young or old.
My mind prefers discreet aversion from them.

Jaq. What sad men learn by tragic peradventure
I would our forest youth might know by choice.

You are their mastiff; guardian in some sort—
Perchance you might instruct them.

Touch. Ah, poor sage,
(Sage for yourself, but otherwards a fool)
In these strange movements reason hath no part:
There is no gulf like that 'twixt mind and heart.

Jaq. Aye, then. What's said is said.—Plainly our Orlando cometh not to the Duke's meat. I'll smuggle you in as *locum tenens*.

Touch. I'll vicar him to the utmost. I am absolute cavern.

Jaq. Salts and sauces being rare under woodland rafters, his grace savours a merry quip as relish. Be advised.

Touch. Please God, my lord of Amiens will not sing until the meal be dispatched. It is weary work to suspend chewing until these melancholy glees be wailed. To interrupt manly victual with a mere madrigal!

[*Exeunt*]

TROPES AND TROPICS

The Tempest, Act. IV, Scene 2

[*The island, near Prospero's cell. Ferdinand and Miranda*]

Ferd. Strange, dear Miranda, though your lips are cool
Those eyelids are so warm. This was a fact
Beyond discrimination, until learned
By kissing—which I do.
Mir. The eyes themselves
Are feverish with looking, sweet my lord.
Ferd. Lips can be cool, for they've some satisfaction:
But, oh, poor eyes, that gaze and gaze and gaze
And never can be filled!
Mir. Why do you love me?
Tell quibblingly and punctually why,
And itemize each tender circumstance.
Ferd. First, then, that thou art singular; thyself;
Dissimilar from other women; frank
To say what's in the heart. When thou art bold
It is the natural appetite of blood;
When modest . . . (*the time of four syllables*

is here excerpted for a gaze of tenderness, or a brief embrace) . . . . it is not
The modesty of custom and device.

Mir. Are not all women so?—Thou know'st them well,
So tutor me their manners.—Are they fair?

Ferd. I have forgotten.

Mir. Conceit me here: extravagant from my sex,
Companioned by the glow-worm and the ouph,
What shall I guess of ladies' tires and fangles?
Alas, poor island weed!—More saucier kirtles,
Quaint gowns and broidered garnish, as I guess,
Adorns the beauties of your father's court.

Ferd. Nay, let them suit themselves. What furniture
You choose to prink withal, shall be the formal:
Most properest wear, since you inhabit it.

Mir. Yet stay me hid on ship, my lord, until
I haberdash and make me brave provision—
Such muniment of ruffs and fardingales
And pretty tricking as becomes a queen . . .

Shall we be happy, King and Queen in Naples?
This sole sea-rounded life is all I know,
I fear the buzz and burthen of that world.

Ferd. You'll be my island still, a dear, dear island
Lost in my ocean love, across whose circle
No other bark shall steer.

Mir. I am my sex's outlaw: humorous guiles
And woman ways my father redes me of
I have no skill in; nay, I only know
To give myself where I would be received.
—Are women kind to women?

Ferd. I would not have you learn that knavish world.
We'll keep in our small island of the mind:
The warm wide sands we'll sprinkle, grain by grain;
Hearken the lustred firestorm in the night
And only lie the closer. Oh, an island
Tropical indeed! Built, barnacled,
With words, accrete and artifexed like corals.
What said the mage your father? All's a show,
Our lives a dreamy fluxion; mind itself
Merely an island in a swim of sleep,
A swound, a drowse, a coma—
Ha, we're commas,

Pointing some antique sentence, whose purport,
Aye, and authority too, are past our ken.

Mir. Words are pale comforters; yet more, much more!
Might we, on our reef seclude, grow weary?
By very closeness tedious to ourselves?

Ferd. Brave honesty, who knows? or who could know?
Though nature hath us in her dainty toil,
Yet beauty is. I guess just how, in sleep,
Your hand, this small brown boyish-hardened hand.
Nests like a thrushbird on your shoulder's curve.
A tawny little bird for such white perching.

Mir. O dear and wicked words, that make the world
Seem lovelier than it is!

Ferd. Dear, underprize not words: they have huge moment,
And there's my pain. Thronged among words, poor punctual,
I feel the press. *Honour's* a massy word,
And *Fame*, and *Truth*, and *Love*—all words of heft;

But the curious comma screws himself in vain
To overpeer the shoulders of those words
And see the sentence whole, and where it tends.

(*Enter Shipmaster, distractedly*)

Master. Sir-reverence, gentles.—What, more cozenage?
More siren stuff? Or do I surely see
The drenched king's drownded son?
Ferd. Sooth, shipman, it is I.
Master. Od's nouns, here's whoreson work for decent ships.
If haply I win back to Naples gulph
And anchor my tall carrack at her ease,
Then may I founder of our civic scald
Ere any wind that flaws shall plump my canvas
Into these elvish regions.
Ferd. Cheerly, good master. Why so curst?
Master. Curst, is it? This comes of a crack-brained prating boteson. A' should anchor his fluky tongue on better holding-ground. No bottom of my regiment ever fell foul before. *Our Lady of Sicily*, marry what a sweet bulk: *Great Harry* herself was ne'er more wieldy. No nimbler vessel hath brooked a countering sea.

Mir. But, stout master, is not all rigged anew,
And trim afloat? For so, at least, I heard.

Master. Aye; but what manner foolery is this?
First my poor craft is split—split like a crumpet,
Indentured on a fanged and toothy shoal
That leaps beneath her bilge.
Then, after some strange interim and nightmare
I see her fresh repaired, refit—but how?
I come ashore: the very greenwood twangles,
Mad music shrills in trees, and thunder claps
In a clean sky. All this is ultra reason.
Sir, I'm with child to have you all inshipped,
Gather my silly swabs and canvas-climbers,
Cask me sweet water, and up hook, away!

Ferd (*to Mir.*)
This is excellent proper to his mystery.
Blame him not.

Mir. Brave captain, I admire not at your trouble:
These matters the event shall explicate.

Master. I'll hope so. But my thought is for the owners—

They'll ask the why of all this new-rigg'd tackle,
This innovated gear; and questions moe.
How shall I make accompt?—And plainly, Sir,
If there are native wenches on this island,
As your enticive company suggests,
Stay them exempt till I recall my sailors.
Those crack-hemps are on loose, and in a heyday
Their sea-sharp'd gust is like to turn toward punks.
—I'll shog. I bid you make good speed aboard.

[*Exit*]

Ferd. He is the absey-book of his brave art:
The shipman's thought is ever of his ship.
Mir. I like him better for't. How excellent
To see him stare when all these accidents
Are opened by my father. And meanwhile
Let's to the cell, and play a round at chess.

[*Exeunt*]

TO A FOREIGNER

Children, leprechauns, women beautifulle and yonge, these be forrainers alle.

SIR EUSTACE PEACHTREE.

Aye, for I knew you foreign! Plain to me
The anxiety that trembled in your gaze—
Your brave but heavy-burning secrecy
Compelled by our more coarse and clumsy ways.

O lovely, lovely! Terror in the eyes,
Poor eagerness to do what men expect:
Willing to stifle your own gay surprise
And pass unquestionable, trim, correct—

Shall you, who have untellable things to say,
Who hear inaudibles, guess the unknown,
"Assimilate," bewildered *émigré*,
In our suspicious and mechanic zone?

Be ever foreign, beautiful and strange!
Nor naturalize (wild word!) that rebel blood:
Docility and use must never change
Your sweet enchanting reckless alienhood.

How did I know you foreign? Your most droll
Blithe candour, so unlike our timid style;
Courteous to our queer modes, yet you console
Your humour with a small comparative smile.

How did I know you stranger, troubled, lonely,
  Thrilled and yet puzzled in a foreign land,
Dear excommunicate?—Ah perhaps only
  Since I am outlandish too. You understand.

FORMAL UTTERANCE OF A PHILOSOPHICAL CHRISTMAS TREE ORNAMENT

When crystalline December
  Has purified the year
The sky is like a window pane
  And cruelly too clear.

Beneath such magic brightness
  Things simply are not so—
The moon and stars are tinsel
  And tinsel is the snow.

Since night and frosty weather
  Are glitteringly untrue
I turn for reillusion,
  My pretty dear, to you.

Though you and I are tinsel
  Upon this Eden tree
Our silver joy and sorrow
  Seem genuine to me:

So keep your scissored profile
  Turned artfully and set
And I shan't have to see you
  As merely silhouette—

More warm than winter's planets
  Are fire and candle light—
Mr. and Mrs. Tinsel
  Will be at home to-night!

FLAMMANTIA MOENIA DEMIMUNDI

(To A. P. Herbert)

You saw Manhattan rising from the sea
And on the clear transparence of her sky
That spiring profile glitter to the sun.
Perhaps I can imagine what you thought:
Why, no one told me it would be like this,
So beautiful, so proud!

One cannot learn about a foreign land
Except by seeing her. So go your ways
Watching and harking in her tall, tall streets,
Alternately aghast, amused, amazed.
See how the bright, thin light that is her own
Shifts daylong on her terraces and cliffs
In opal tints; at dusk the fallen sun

A bonfire at the foot of crosstown streets.
Panelling night with wainscotry of gold,
She ends each day in gusts of phœnix fire—
The flaming ramparts of her demi-world!

Mark all these things: her generous reckless moods,
Proud, spendthrift, swift, assured, and terrible;
And make interpretation of your own.
But just one *caveat:*
She is not always merely what she seems:
I'd like to have you see her as I do—
The greatest unwrit poem in the world.

MEDITATIONS WHILE ASCENDING THE PARK PLACE ESCALATOR

When March comes in, with rhubarb stews
And Heaven exhibits softer blues,
  I'll lay aside my chiding—
I'll open my window wide to-day
(Unanswered letters waft away)
I'll gaze on Woolworth's tower—hooray,
For when I see that pinnacle
I never can be cynical—
  O Park Place escalator, steadily sliding!

Yes, when I see that pinnacle
I never can be cynical;
I'll use it as a binnacle
  To steer me in my dream—
I'll visit haberdasheries
And have my lunch in hasheries
  With strawberries and cream—
  O Park Place escalator, follow the gleam!

You think I am mad . . . well, I don't know
(For telephone calls might make one so),
But when such pungent March-gusts blow
And the city lifts her impudent, wild
Summits, against clean blue profiled,
Then, though I know what can be said
Against her—Cruel, vain; and dead
To loveliness the hearts of men
(Say it, and say it yet again)
But still I hesitate to damn . . .
You think I'm mad——
  Perhaps I am.

All cities to the seeing eye
Are beautiful; there you descry
Men's miseries and competitions,
Their paradoxes and ambitions
Grown to their fullest dreadfulness—
All passions at their proud excess.
For students of the troubled heart
Cities are perfect works of art.

O Park Place escalator, run!
Carry your pilgrim toward the sun!

Here, in this living vast thesaurus
The whole of literature before us—
Richer than Shakespeare's folios
The actual drama burns and glows,
And even absurdity is the stuff
Of art, if it's absurd enough.
Here, in this great sky-pointing town
See how the wise man and the clown
Have built an earthly monument
Of such appalling huge extent
That hardly God could tear it down—
Out, poet, out! and bravely brood
The horrors of her magnitude.

What town so glamorous to be sung,
So potent to arouse the young
Anger and pride that feed on beauty—
O poets, poets, do your duty!
Because she is mad, how she does cry
For your particular sanity:
Her riant noons, divine with sun,
And then, ere night is quite begun
And ere the daylight faded quite
Above that gorge of gaudy light

Dimmed by the movies' frantic glare
A timid moon above Times Square!
Thus, gesturing to my Creator,
I left the Park Place escalator.

SOLILOQUY ON THE POOP

(To Hamish Miles, S. S. *Aquitania*, September 12, 1922)

Now, as our spiry wedge of cliffs recedes,
And, for a moment, up the Broadway chine
(Like a deep axe-cut to the very root)
Your eye can pierce the forestry of stone
To the actual window, almost, where we talked
And you, not stranger long, were well-beloved—
What is your parting thought?

These men are mad, perhaps your fancy runs?
Caught in that general and excessive haste,
Panic, anxiety, acceleration
That strains the varsal world;
Caught in their lofty gold-and-gimcrack madhouse;
Or, childish rajahs of a new Golconda
Riding their giddy city, a gilded howdah
Endorsed upon the elephantine orb.

Perhaps you brood: the fellows must be humoured,
They have the wild and cunning force of madmen
And terrible strength at will.

Yet not quite that (beshrew me!) is your *vale.*
Already, I could see, you truly loved her
And knew behind her riotous infection
Astonishing brave gust.
I think it's true
She has already sickened one stage further
Than any other town, in this strange fever
Men must control and medicine, or fail.
But here's the crux: how much of what one sees
Is really part of her? how much mere reflex
Of the beholder's eye and way of thought?
No glib poetic generalities
Will serve to annotate such unco scenes.
A city where by gorgeous accident
Men were encinct with beauty, but hardly knew it;
Glutted with all perfected toys of life
But life itself, their only only treasure,
Ran meagre, hasty, improvised, and thin.
Beauty? Ambiguous word, too cheaply flourished—
Beauty is where life moves in quietness,
Tacit agreement in unselfish aims:
Where trivial things are recognized as trivial,
And silence precedes speech.—Or other beauty,
As where a man's whole heart's in conflagration,
Ruddily painting all the neighbourhood:
Then, with true urchin zest, from unscorched vantage,
The observer claps. Oh, see the pretty fire!

Well . . . You have seen our Earthly Paradox,
Our Canaanitish Promissory Land
Where strong men, yipping freedom, gyve themselves.
And you do well, though wistful the sternward gaze,
To seek your peace and calmly think it over.
Aye: in one mood I'm tempted most to quote
One stanza from a very noble poem—
(I'll write one line, and you will know the rest)
"*But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!*"

Yet that's misleading. I'm no ironist.
We, not wing-footed casuals like yourself,
Live with her daily, climb her jag sierras,
Treading on golden air. Here's an arena
For poets unafraid! For though she maces
Soft wits to pudding, brittle wits to powder,
There must and shall emerge some tougher scald
Whose words are sharply struck to bear abrasion,
Fiery purged to rise above the slag.
And we, like pelicans, from sore-tweaked bosoms
Feather a nest for some great egg of song!

So here she is, a pricklejoy for poets:
They turn and warm her in dissolvent thought,
Polish or chip an edge, or knurl an angle
To see how she'll sit easiest in the mind.
Make no mistake: theirs is a happy fortune:
Among her hugeous perpendiculars

(Great lines of verse, up-ended and unrhymed)
They live like commas in a perfect poem.

And now you see her jutting typescript fade:
The rough draft of the most inflaming poem
That man has ever dreamed.
If madmen love their madhouse, it may be
All driven men may learn to love their earth
And honour, not deface it.
Don't forget
The Woolworth and those other mighty lines
Now dipping backward in a mist of pearl.

AN ALTITUDO AT FIVE P. M.

"*I love to lose myself in a mystery, to pursue my Reason to an O Altitudo!*"

SIR THOS. BROWNE.

Across the dead acre of Saint Paul's
The darkness falls,
And under those steep walls
And cliffs of golden panellings
There crawls an Elevated train.

Here, through a dusty window pane
I see great wings—
Wings darkly spread against the blue;
Or, burning high in level sun
Him, my Shining One!

So, through the speckled opaque brain
Men look, and see, or think they see,
Doting on their idolatry:
But shall they minify in a creed
The God, the Shining One I need?

Mine is the God of the sounding whale
(The thresh of that great tail!)
God of the orchid's fluted womb,
The God from whom
No thought, no mind can ever be shut out,
The God of gales and gravity,
The God of honourable doubt.
God of the odorous Eskimo
Under the flickering Arctic glow.

God of the Kootenai forest spires
(I've seen them on a postal card)
God of the dog that never tires
Of looking hopefully at his master.
The God (though you may find him hard)
Of ecstasy and of disaster.
God of the influenza germ,
God of the leopard and the worm—
But even "God"'s too narrow a word,
Defaced by zealot use, I've heard.

The uplook to those great dark wings
A nobler extuition brings;

And with no self-hypnotic awe
But in an agony and mirth
I saw the small intrepid earth
Tossed in the gust of Perfect Law.
And yet you ask me if I pray?
Ah! leave to me
My own content idolatry
And let me worship and obey
My Golden Lightning every day!

I pray you give me generous heed,
This contradicts no mystic creed:
But I suspect, among my sins,
Where the creeds end, Belief begins.

IOTA SUBSCRIPT

(Nominative meets Accusative; they discourse somewhat as follows)

Half mad with joy I ran my race
Just, just ahead of the threatening chase
And yet how happy, happy I
To know pursuit press hot and nigh.
"Follow! Come close, push hard!" I cried;
"You see me still unterrified:
Though panting, shaken, fugitive,
By that same sign I know I live."

And there were some (I heard) quite merry
Claimed to have found me on the ferry;
Another said: "I have a hunch:
In Theatre Alley he eats lunch,
We'll find him there."
But ah, my laddie,
Abandoning the finnan haddie,
Making escapement mighty fleet
I doubled into Vesey Street;
And in the tube, at Astor Place,
I slid the side-door in his face.

Sometimes, at dusk on Brooklyn Heights
Watching Manhattan's spangled lights
I utter a loud incautious Word—
Then, fearing I am overheard
And doubting whether, or by whom,
Make swift eruption toward Grant's Tomb.
So, in this city of my adoring,
This golden map of my exploring,
I fled and fled and ran and ran
Evasive of my fellow-man;
And equally awkward, shy, and odd
I felt toward my fellow-God.

Circles are curious to construe:
Do you chase me, or I chase you?
For, the more privily I ensued
Seclusion, I found multitude,

And knew, when I was most alone,
That all men's hearts were in my own.

I, perhaps the all-happiest man
Since modern miseries began:
Rebel, conformist, both in one,
A zebra, a chameleon!
How many me's can coexist:
The turncheek, the coercionist,
The dreamer and the angry child—
Blake and Babbitt reconciled!
Aye, in my breast I find them all—
Animal, vegetable, mineral,
Earth and Ocean, Air and Fire,
Renunciation and Desire:
Truly the inmost in o' me
Is tensile with antinomy!

It's tempting to o'erdramatize
This curious coil of Me's and I's:
The ego, that industrious elf,
Loves to boswellize itself.
The simplest words will have to do.
This "I" is not just *Me*, but You;
And here, uneasy in its middle,
We feel the queer subjacent riddle.
Greek, Greek to us, indeed we find
The iota subscript of the mind.

And yet, and yet, I daren't delay:
What must be said I'll say To-day:
To-morrow—why, To-morrow might
Be all too late; and then to-night
Silent, sole, and free to write,
I shall be much too restless, I;
For Cassiopeia in the sky
Revolving in her easy chair
(Punctuated in black air)
Teases, teases me anew
With her great childish W . . .
Whose initial is it, I muse?
And echo softly murmurs, Who's.
I love that cosmic monogram
(*Such* scrawl, my dear!)—and also damn
And guess each star that burns in dark
The dot beneath a question mark.

Some day they'll find you and come at you
(Somewhere near the Lightning statue)
Or snare you in a telephone booth
And force you to admit the truth.
Resolute men, sharp-witted, keen,
Will ask precisely what you mean.
Ah, but they must pursue me first
Along the road to Lindenhurst
Where, over miles of scrub and fern
The sweet salt breezes move; or learn

To trace my footprints on the sand
Of our old Moby-Dick-shaped land,
Our sea-rubbed Paumanok.
What speech
Men use at Asharoken Beach
Feeling the onrush of a sonnet
That curls and slides in parallels
(Fourteen foams of sense) and tells
More than it says. So ponder on it.

Fair arable soil (the guidebooks say)
We have out our Long Island way:
But ah, the earth where Walt was born
Grows something richer than mere corn:
Drive deep the share! In, inward hoe!
Tall crops of verses, row on row!

Happy, I said . . . I won't revise
The word, or tell convenient lies.
I know with accuracy exact
How risible I am, how cracked;
For I was made (as I have said)
That Folly might be pèrfected,
That Ridicule might take fresh heart—
As Fool, I am a work of art.
As Fool I am not small or niggling:
I am the Fool that set God giggling.

I said the simplest words would do . . .
What's true of me, is true of you.

OF A PHANTOM

"It fell about the Martinmas," as well as I remember it—
I think it was November; it was after Hallowe-en—
And I sprang up from dreaming, and in my midnight solitude
I found these words: they spoke themselves, to say what I had seen.

She came, so small and shivering: I wondered what had frightened her!
I tightened her in circling arms, and, oh, but she was chill—
She climbed at once to my embrace: I felt her shaken, quivering.
I heard the loud November gust that scoured the window sill.

Blown, lost and maddened in the night—what gales had nearly perished her?
I cherished her, and soothed her close; I clasped her, flesh and bone;
And with a father's tenderness and no emotion carnaller
I held the sorry little corp to warm it at my own.

I saw her not, but somehow guessed the dark-
ened little face of her—
The pitiful small grace of her, so stricken
and so wild;
Undisciplined and desperate, a swept Novem-
ber flitterling—
So, in the bedstead of my arms, she slept, a
frightened child.

Such was my dream. I have no care to set about
debating it:
Translating it so often robs a dream of half its
charms.
I just happen to be thinking of a lonely wet No-
vember
And a phantom of poor innocence that crept
into my arms.

SLEEP

(An Oration for outwitting Drowsiness, to be intoned toward Midnight, with a cup of strong coffee)

Sleep, dear Sleep, sweet harlot of the senses
Delilah of the spirit, you unnerve
The strong man's knees, depose his laughing brain,
And make him a mere mass of steady breathing,
A bag of sluggish automatic tubes

No better than a dog beside a fire.
Soft enemy of will and pure ambition,
Vampire of poets and all who aspire,
You blur and fog the mind with luxury:
I fight against you, grudge you every hour;
If I must yield, I yield unreconciled
And even then my thought shall flutter free
In the creative brightness of a dream.

Here, in our frozen rustic starry stillness
How shall I try to burn your spell away?
To cauterize my aimless beastlike sloth,
To fan that clinkered ashy spark of spirit
And make it blaze and shine, transparent, free,
As in a child who, caught with sudden laughter,
Runs with face of glory to its mother?

I'll read some bitter book to purge my languor;
Think of the city on a winter morning,
Its clumsy turrets verticalled on gold;
Or think of words, words with a brassy sound—
Rivalry, *ambition*, *courage*, *honour*—
Words lovely in black ink and Caslon type.
Call upon all that private giddy madness,
Those fits of happy raving, secret frenzy,
That each man has, unshared, unsaid, unknown.

Think of great winds, of Chaucer, what you
please—
Think of the subways roaring through the dark
With rows of stoic faces, never seen,
And station lamps like strings of amber beads;
Windows of mean streets in a wash of rain
Crowded with Christmas tinsels, green and blue.
Think anything, to goad and prick the mind!

O Sleep, loved Sleep, how I will make you hated!
O "soft embalmer" whom great poets praise,
Sleek death and funeral of my happy ardours!
You who have dimmed and dulled so many
dreams—
Yes, young and eager and ambitious souls
Drooping to the warm and craven bed
Shall groan and beat the brow and hesitate,
Renew the troubled task, and weary say,
"No longer will I wait on inspiration,
But write, straight-out, what lies within my heart:
Not biding for some lucky gush of words.
For if not now, then when? I dare not sleep!"

Yet, in the end, you take us all, dear Sleep—
And not as now, when, even while we drowse
The mind, still rocking like an ocean bird,
Knows itself poised upon the unknowing gulf;

But when, all grateful and without wild words
The dark sea-rim enfolds us, circle-round.
A clear unrippled sea of endless calm
And on the wave, not even a lonely gull.

CHATEAU DE MISSERY

"Here is a place where poems might be made." . . .
But in the linden arch such matins twittered,
Fish swam such curves beneath the balustrade,
The poet paused and found himself embittered.
Stubble was savoury by the grasscut edge,
The sun decanted Meursault-coloured shine,
And shamed by random mosses on the ledge
He corked the inkpot and uncorked the wine.

Here every shape outrhymes the poet's wit:
In every view such harmonies are spoken
New-joinered verses will not do, he fears.
Bring out some strong old sonnet, polished fit,
Plain as these grainy panels, dark and oaken,
Rubbed and sweetened by Burgundian years.

MEMORANDA FOR A SONNET SEQUENCE

.. The herb Lunaria, ceremoniously gathered at set times, laid upon any lock it makes it flie open.

THOMAS FULLER.

I

The herb Lunaria, old books aver,
If gathered thus and so, in moony patches,
Has property of mystic opener
When laid upon the fastest locks and latches.
In this respect, the moonplant duly matches
The magic of the poets, who bestir
Their art to loosen spirit's careful catches
And split our secret bolts like gossamer.

To sprinkle moonseed on the tight-locked soul
Bidding it open, or stand soft ajar—
To sprinkle moonseed, gathered thus and so,
This is the poet's honourable rôle.
Like some old Tudor captain bound afar
I hear him crying *Inward! Inward Ho!*

II

So put your trust in poets. They'll befriend
Your mind with truth, that nourishing surprise;
In matters whither prose can scarce extend
They'll speak you plainly and without disguise.

They shrive you boldly, minus compromise:
No gusty jargon, spuriously penned,
But that true language all can recognize
And no man ever fully comprehend.

Then put your trust in poets. They'll not fake,
Pretending meanings in things utterly vain;
You cannot coffin them on lonely shelves.
The hopes we were half shamed of, and the ache,
They know; they succor us with mirth and pain
And words that make us real to ourselves.

III

How often accent, metric scheme, and time
Compel the poet to give sense a twist;
And reckoning his prosody, his chime,
He finds that what he meant to say, he missed.
But of his art this is the happy gist,
That words will sometimes blossom, spread, and climb
Like roses on a trellis. Double assist
Makes lovely the bare lattice of his rhyme.

My sonnet rhymes AB, AB, BA . . .
And life, like verse, seems coded on strict plan;
Too slavish to technique, we stunt the dream.
But whiles, when pure strong passion has her way,
Beauty can flourish wildest and still scan,
Truest to thought since also true to scheme.

IV

A Trial Balance, to see what I find:—
DEBIT: A greedy fool of sensual earth,
Cursed with a thousand trivials, and inclined
To surly indolence, ungainly mirth.
CREDIT: I seem to feel some spunk of worth
Or I should never be so hot to grind
My wits against the stone, and bring to birth
Sonnets, these broken fragments of the mind.

Aye: here we settle up and make redress,
We certify and find the books correct
And on the honest side a balance due:
What poets write in private selfishness
Becomes a public asset, in effect,—
For trying to tell his heart, he tells yours too.

V

This is a sonnet of praise: astounded praise
In honour of men's intricate affairs—
I weary of the indignants and blasés
Who only see stupidities, despairs.
These smoky smouldering spirits, are they heirs
Of those great souls that burned with such clear blaze?
There is in every hour, my heart declares
Wonder enough to last me all my days.

I used to keep a diary, but discerned
No evening industry could tally truly
The astonishment of life, or itemize
My mirth. Yet I'm not heartless, having learned
That if a man laughs too loud, and unduly,
He usually finds tears in his eyes.

VI

Certainly that night I was uninspired—
Too tired to write, even too tired to think;
Tired of the search for words that I desired
And their sweet curlicues penned in black ink.
And why the devil (thought I) should I swink
To discover my fool heart? So, quite unfired
By any ember, and with eyes all blink
I lurched to bed. I repeat it, I was tired.

Sudden, with heart of anger, eager-witted,
I leapt, and wrote: *I lied, I lied, I lied!*
In blackest of the black now let this shine:
There are some ills can never be acquitted:
Love turned to lust; and poets who have died
Before they'd ever written a perfect line.

VII

There always are a hundred good excuses
Why this particular work we might postpone—
The casual distractions and abuses,
Or weariness, the dentist, or the phone.

If people would (you say) let you alone. . . .
And letters should be answered . . . but the deuce is
That days to weeks, and weeks to months have grown,
And years are flowing downward through their sluices.

This is the greatest cleavage among men:
In politics or trade you daren't be rude,
But No is the master word in every art.
O poet, learn you to be churlish, then—
Your work is done in hard-earned solitude
And with a spice of anger in the heart.

VIII

Printers and proofreaders have rigid rules
And fetiches of use. They concentrate
On the mere literal text, the molecules
Of syntax; if you phrase or punctuate
An unfamiliar way, they'll regulate
And drill you to the usage of the schools.
Stiff-grammared men, and stubborn in debate,
They teach us to be canny with our tools.

And yet I warn you of Proofreader's Mind
Which, burning on the rote, grows a disease.
Read not the text of life as proofmen do,

For error, not for meaning; lest you find
(Punctilious with mere apostrophes)
You miss the inward plot, the large construe.

IX

On a subject that has been much hemmed and hawed
I'll give you ultimate reason. I mean, Sex.
Sex, I believe, is Nature's most gorgeous fraud:
She makes us think (the moralist to vex)
It more important than it is: she decks
It prettily with colours, and we're awed.
She has reasons of her own, not free from specks—
Her methods sometimes seem a little broad.

But that's biology, solely. When the poet
Deals with the theme, it shows quite different laws,
Justifies the embarrassing He and She.
Along with Sex, the Muse makes her introit:
Women are snares, no doubt, but also cause
Of all the world's most lovely poetry.

X

Here is this darling day: how shall I spin
Its texture out and make it long for you?
Extenuate these hours so wide and thin
You'll almost see Eternity shine through!

To-day we'll wear Time threadbare; patch it, too,
With little partings, just for discipline;
When necessary, without sour ado
Let this day end, that others may begin.

How well Time wears! Examined thread by thread
A Day is a baby Year . . . looks like its father . . .
Now, lost in happy silences and words
I had forgot we ever shall be dead.
And later, we'll pretend (if you would rather)
The evening crickets are the morning birds.

XI

Rich am I now; yes, rich beyond belief
Having To-day in pouch; yet soon, the reverse:
To-day will flit, which constitutes my grief
And leaves me beggar, with an empty purse.
I'm also something bolder and much worse
For this To-day I stole, and that's my chief
Exult. As in the rune we learned at nurse
I'm rich man, poor man, beggar man, and thief.

But conscience pricks me not. To be explicit,
I feel more pride than shame at this poor theft:
I deem it Petty, not Grand larceny.
Old spendthrift Time will never even miss it;
Little it was to him: he's plenty left . . .
Little to him, but infinite to me!

XII

How quaint life's oddities are. How quaint! . . .
until
They happen to yourself. Then humour dies
And laughter seems to grow a trifle shrill.
How comic lovers are, storming good-byes,
Unless you're one of them. With pained surprise
Men learn that poetry's not just the skill
Of words long dead; but actual You's and I's—
And if you have not learned that yet, you will.

Me is a touchy creature, chained near home:
Calm to observe the trespasses next door,
But, on his own estate, quick to take fright—
And hearing footsteps that too closely come
Shouts instant outraged clamour, like the roar
And honest anger of a dog at night.

XIII

And so I give you words to keep you fair:
Lovely words, older than I or you;
Experienced proud words, each one an heir,
Assembled here with such observance due
They'll feel a little lonely and askew
In any other poem anywhere.
I'd like to have them feel—well, not quite true
In other poems, if you were not there.

Yet we will not be selfish. Like the seeds
Of our Lunaria, these words we'll scatter
Hoping that in some distant May or June
Others will find them fragrant for their needs,
And walk among them, pondering the matter
As in a garden brightened by the moon.

ON A PORTRAIT OF DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL.D.

(By Sir J. Reynolds, now owned by A. E. N.)

This is the Doctor Johnson of the "Prayers"—
  That great, tormented, craggy man, who poured
His sloth, his lovingkindness, and his cares
  In agonized petitions to the Lord.

O rough, pure, stubborn, troubled soul: for whom
  A smile of special tenderness men keep—
Who prayed for strength "to regulate my room,"
  And "preservation from immoderate sleep." . . .

If life brought Doctor Johnson to his knees
It may bring others also, if you please—
Bachelors of Arts . . .
  And LL. D's.

WHERE THE BLUE BEGINS

I am not free—
And it may be
Life is too tight around my shins;
For, unlike you,
I can't break through,
A truant where the blue begins.

Out of the very element
Of bondage, that here holds me pent,
I'll make my furious sonnet:
I'll turn my noose
To tight-rope use
And madly dance upon it.

So I will take
My leash, and make
A wilder and more subtle fleeing—
And I shall be
More escapading and more free
Than you have ever dreamed of being!

DESIDERIO PULCHRIORA

A half-moon drifting in the West
  Lit by a sunset honey-clear
Is gilded rather like her breast—
  Not quite, but near.

Pale rubbings from the moth's wing, marred
  By caging fingers, also serve
For likeness of her bosom toward
  Its small, small curve.

But that, unseen and only guessed,
  This madrigal shall not convey:
My head lay never on that breast—
  Nor never may.

SOLILOQUY FOR A THIRD ACT

What is this sullen curious interval
Between the happy Thought, the languid Act?
What is this dull paralysis of Will
That lets the fatal days drift by like dreams?
Of the mind's dozing splendours what remains?
What is this *Now* I utter to you here?

This Now, for great men dead, was golden Future;
For happier souls to come, conjectured Past.
Men love and praise the Past—the only thing
In all the great commodity of life
That grows and grows, shining and heaping up
And endlessly compounds beneath their hands:
Richer we are in Time with every hour,
But in nought else.—The Past! I love the Past—
Stand off, O Future, keep away from me!

Yet some there are, great thoughtless active souls,
Can use the volvant circle of the year
Like a child's hoop, and flog it gleefully
Along the downward slope of busy days;
But some, less lucky.
What wretch invented Time and calendars
To torture his weak wits, to probe himself
As a man tongues a tender concave tooth?
See, all men bear this secret cicatrix,
This navel mark where we were ligatured
To great Eternity; and so they have
This knot of Time-sense in their angry hearts.

So must I die and pass to Timeless nothing?
It will not, shall not, cannot, must not be!
I'll print such absolute identity
Upon these troubled words, that finding them

In some old broken book (long, long away),
The startled reader cries, Here was a Voice
That had a meaning, and outrode the years!

WHERE MORE IS MEANT

Dazzled, how the brown moth flutters
  (In my fingers prisoned tight)
Ere, through opened sash and shutters,
  Loosed into the night.

Surely clutched but softly holden
  (Least of struggling ticklish things)
Let him go . . .
    My hand is golden,
  Dusty from his wings.

(Christopher Morley)

CONFESSION IN HOLY WEEK

Taking a charity
  To Mrs. McBride,
What do you think, then,
  I plainly espied?
A small, darksome leprechaun,
  Wishful, grey-eyed!

Leprechaun, leprechaun,
Where are you faring?
Out in an Easter wind
Just for an airing?

Did I say *grey*-eyed?
I'm still a bit muddled;
Sure in the clear of them
Gold lights were puddled,
And, very likely, a glint of the green
(Like leafshine in hedges, when sun slips between).

Halted? I gapped there! The dapperest baggage!
(A she of them, too: as you know, it is rare).
And in spite of its queer little toss of defiance
There was something distressful, I thought, in its air.

Leprechaun, leprechaun,
What are you doing?
Would you expose yourself
To a man's wooing?

Lord, but the comical, tempting small creature,
Dainty and eager, and soft as a cat:
Womanlike, too, in each curving and feature,
The brooch on her kerchief unfastened, at that!

Leprechaun, leprechaun,
Golden or grey,
Big winds can blow
Little people away.

What might she do (was my thought, in a tingle)
Paddling cold hedges, on rainywet nights?
Sure, let her have just the jog of my ingle,
Which would be irksome to nobody's rights.

Fool, then, and fool, then! I must have been tipsy.
I should have crossed myself. Clumsily mannish,
Putting my hand out to snare the wee gypsy. . . .
I'd ought have known. If you touch them—
they vanish.

And that, Father Daly, explains why I lied
To tell how the milk soured on Mrs. McBride.

OF A VESEY STREET CURB PREACHER

Cheerful the evangelist scrawls
His texts on pavements and on walls,
Imploring others to repent
Lest their imperilled souls be shent.

And, burdened with my virtue, I
Salute him as I ramble by;
Nor marvel he is so elated
From Hell to be emancipated.

But I, between the daily hames
Or cindered with my private flames
Pause and benignantly astonish
To hear the simpleton admonish.

For what, indeed, shall I retract?
I, dull and decent in each act!
I, the scorched asbestos clod,
Rebuke to pyrotechnic God!

I, funambulous o'er the pit
Where all the fires of Self are lit—
I, Leda bashful of the Swan,
Beachcomber of the Rubicon!

Before I utter palinode
Let planets curve a different road:
Unmandible the angry ant
And bid biology recant!

Be wary how you reprobate
Virtue already overweight.

WIND BEFORE BREAKFAST

I heard it from the willow tree
Tossed by the wind so silverly:
That some day this bright world shall be
More clean, more lovely, and more free . . .
A free and clean and lovely earth?
I tell it you for what it's worth.

There was some meaning in that air:
I tell you that I saw it there,
White windy patterns in the sky,
The willows tossed, and Truth came by—
A world more generous and clean,
A world more worth its blue and green . . .
It may be, or it may not be—
No willow ever lied to me.

SHAKESPEARE IN STRATFORD CHURCH

A Sunday morning in old Stratford church—
After the service sundry travellers
Halting above me here to gape, let fall:
"I wonder what Will Shakespeare would have said
To hear that sermon?"

"Well, I guess he'd say
'Too simple stuff for me,' and go home smiling.
I guess he didn't come here very often. . . ."

Good friend, good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To talk mere fustian. Since you dig the dust
Of my poor credo: What a man believes
Or, likelier, believes that he believes,
Is nothing—nay, 'tis something, if it be
But nice politeness to the tenderhood
Of honest worthy folk. I doubt man's mind
Hath no such natural scope to make it matter
If he believe, or what. Perchance he finds
Sermons in stones, riddles in everything.
Yet I hear many sermons in this chancel,
And not one fruitless, not one lacking seed
For any fertile apprehensive sense.
You know the world, the great, sweet curious world,
More presently than I. If in men's deeds
There runs such rich and strong-enjoining ruth,
Such charity, such generous brave amend
For all the peevish errors of the time,
Then fleer, then mock the hopeful bended knee.

You study. There are still some trifling ways
Wherein the antique virtues might avail?

Humility, forbearance, tender heart?
Our rustic rites hold method yet, and meat
At least so much as in a cockney egg?
Ere you displant our old simplicity
Cleanse the foul body of the infected world.

SIGNBOARD FOR AN OASIS

As I walked up on Homesick Hill
  I hoped no man would speak to me,
For I had curious thoughts to think
  And a setting moon to see.

But then a cheerful person came.
  "Well, neighbour, all alone?" he said.
—Yes, folks will always talk to me
  Until the day I'm dead.

A GLEE UPON CIDER

(For Baritone and Bass)

What makes the cider blow its cork
  With such a merry din?
What makes those little bubbles rise
  And dance like harlequin?
It is the fatal apple, boys,
  The fruit of human sin.

The fall of man, the fall of fruit,
So all things fall, pardee!
But in this world of mickle dross
I'm not pernickettee—
The sins they sinned in Eden, boys,
Are bad enough for me.

So when the deep disgust takes hold
And I am dumb and dry,
I'll quit the folk who pester me
And tell the world good-by,
And settle at the cider mill
In Jericho, L. I.

My mind is twinged with growing pains
And I desire to think;
And what I want to think about
Might not look well in ink—
I'll sit beside a cider jug
And take a little drink.

I will not answer letters, and
I will not have a phone:
For I would like to read a book
And just be left alone—
Beside the hissing cider jug
I'll make my private moan.

Beside the fuming cider jug
  I'll spend my nights and days,
And on unanswerable stars
  I placidly will gaze—
From ferment up to firmament
  This ditty I will raise:

What makes the cider blow its cork
  With such a merry din?
What makes those little bubbles rise
  And dance like harlequin?
It is the fatal apple, boys,
  The fruit of human sin.

THE SONNETEER AND HIS PRINCIPLE OF RELATIVITY

He dreams of words, words furiously thrown
Beyond the clutching gravity of Time;
So passionately interlocked in rhyme
They take on flight and being of their own.
Above his mundane, gross and cloudy zone
He sees them pierce inertia, soar, and climb
Along great arcs of love and anger; blown
Ablaze like comets in the dark sublime.

Why not? Two colons, four apostrophes,
Two semi-colons and two periods,
Two dashes and one hyphen, if you please,
Might put my name among the deathless gods.
These (and the words) and just a twice-used
comma
Make up *On Looking Into Chapman's Homer.*

BALLADE OF THE LOST REFRAIN

In a vacant mood the phrase came to me—
Alas! I neglected to make it mine—
It may have been jocund, or deep and gloomy:
It is gone, and has left no trace or sign.
It is gone, and it might have been the line
That in all men's memories would remain:
It is vanished, and never again will shine—
O lovely lyrical lost refrain!

Though Apollo's golden sandal shoe me,
Dionysos pour me his purpling wine,
That forgotten snatch will still pursue me
And chafe my spirit and chill my spine;
For lo! when one of the Muses nine,
Descending, stoops to a clownish brain,
She expects him to note the hint divine—
O lovely lyrical lost refrain!

And now—no wonder my joints are rheumy
  And I am listless to laugh or dine,
And my lightsome friends say they never knew me
  So dolorobiliously peak and pine;
But I have no mnemonics than can untwine
  That line so musical, terse, urbane,
Chryselephant, nympholept, sapphirine—
  O lovely lyrical lost refrain!

ENVOY

O Muse (as Rosalind said), come woo me!
  My sorrowful heart you may soothe and sain,
But never again will that thrill run through me—
  O lovely lyrical lost refrain!

BALLADE OF LIBROLARCENY

When this ballade appears in print
  Someone will feel a guilty thrill,
So circulate it without stint
  And shout it loud on every hill.
The bibliopilfering bibliophil
  Perhaps will ponder and repent
To hear me cry with accent shrill
  Where are the books that I have lent?

Where are my Gissings gone, I hint?
  Whose bookcase do my Conrads fill?
And my *Decameron?* I squint
  Along my shelves and feel a chill:
Lavengro gone! O imbecile
  To lend that book! Yes, I am shent.
I'll put your conscience on the grill:
  Where are the books that I have lent?

My Daisy Ashford, my *Peer Gynt,*
  My *Ocean Tramp*—all gone! Until
Those books come back my heart is flint;
  My *Trivia,* too—a bitter pill!
Now, by the root of Ygdrasil
  I ask where my Max Beerbohms went?
And so I roar, with metric skill,
  Where are the books that I have lent?

ENVOY

The bibliokleptomaniac will
  Reply (of course) he truly meant
To bring them back last week. . . . But still
  Where are the books that I have lent?

A BIRTHDAY POEM FOR A DOG

Brown as a November tree,
  Lightfoot as a leaf wind-blown,
Gissing stands and stares at me
  Asking that a stick be thrown.

Cider-coloured are his eyes,
  Fierce and anxious, bright as flame—
Mumbling stones, he whines and tries
  To persuade me to a game.

After breakfast, on clear days
  Gissing sings his morning song:
Barks for me to come—his craze
  Is to hunt sticks all day long.

Wide he spreads his naily paws
  Ready either way to run—
Like a V his gaping jaws,
  Grinning with expected fun.

He's excitable and young
  And he loves companionship;
Pink and slidder droops his tongue
  With a bubble at the tip.

I believe that if I could
  Throw sticks for him all day through
(All the sticks in Roslyn Wood)
  Still he'd bark and still pursue.

So I will not be a tease—
  There! The longed-for stick is thrown—
See him scud among the trees
  Like a leaf by winter blown!

THE FARTHING

(For translation into German)

Once, at a crowded corner,
  Where many people go,
I found a small thing shining—
  A coin I did not know.

It was, perhaps, a farthing,
  Of brassy metal struck,
But prettily would serve me
  As pocket-piece, for luck.

Yet, oh, my dainty farthing
  (Small as a silver bit)
When rubbed and warmed and carried
  I learn the wealth of it!

For this, my troven trinket
  Which in my purse I hold,
Is of no baser metal
  Than pure untarnished gold

OH, APRIL!

Oh, April, April, April,
Sweet song-enchanted word!
When March went out at midnight
Each sleeping poet stirred—
From Hanover to Hatteras
Each poet on his mattress
Was whispering unheard:
  Daffodil and *thrill* and *spill*,
  Hill, *will*, *still*, and *window sill*—
Darling poets, hark, oh, hark,
Softly rhyming in the dark!

When April comes, each poet
With secret glory glows—
Instinctively he knows it,
And to his art he owes it
No longer to inclose it
In mere mechanic prose:
  The Muse, that has been truant,
  Is suddenly more fluent
(As this impromptu shows).

Oh, April, April, April,
How sweet for either sex
When even minor poets
Are cashing minor checks.
In April, April, April,
Sing *tree* and *free* and *sea*—
But, ah, no April demiurge
Shall make a Fool of me!

SOLILOQUY IN A MENTAL SANITARIUM

I hadn't been mad for some five or six years,
And I feared I was getting too sane,
So I went for a night with my idiot peers
And was princely and foolish again.
I said what I thought of the church and the state,
And I argued and doubted and prayed,
And the company all were most highly elate
At the waggish remarks that I made.

The Bishop (I said) at my infidel *mots*
Will perspire in a doctrinal funk—
The Big Advertiser I'll tweak by the nose
And convict him of puerile bunk;

The political tribe, who are uttering tripe,
I'll abash with a barytone *Bosh!*
And I cried, as I kindled my fruity old pipe,
That it all will come out in the wash.

But here was the odd (and most saddening) thing
In my fine metaphysical spree:
The solemn old fakers whose necks I would wring
Were greatly delighted with me.
For they thought it was all just a rollicking joke,
And they smiled at the ferment of youth—
But never in anything ever I spoke
Did I stick quite so close to the truth!

HER PROSODY

Use can so well assist the pen:
For instance, take the poet, when
He finds the rhyme particular
Which seemed as distant as a star
And makes him happiest of men.

By metres conned, again, again,
I feel equipped to praise you, then—
Assist me sing you beyond par
Use can so well.

As poised and lyric as a wren,
As graceful as a line of ten
  Long-cherished syllables you are,
  And lovelier than a rondeau, far—
O finest praise within my ken:
  You scan so well!

AUSTIN DOBSON

(1840–1921)

Austin Dobson, a writer of light verse. —Newspaper obituary.

Ah! would that poets all could write
  In ink as clear as Dobson's was:
Master of airy fancy, light
  As morning cobwebs on the grass.

Tenderest trifler! how he caught
  (So charmingly, so many times)
The swift, reluctant birds of thought
  In the bright cages of his rhymes.

And Time, that jingles in his purse
  Mixed coinages, both new and old,
Makes change with bronze or silver verse
  But spends not his, a coin of gold!

HE BIDS HIS MUSE CONTENT HERSELF IN PATIENCE

Oh not to-night . . . Oh not to-night!
No, eager heart, I will not write
My One Immortal Verse to-night!

There are a hundred reasons why
To-night is not the time. For I
Am stale and stagnant. By and by!

Some other time, divinely stirred
To fury, I will grind and gird
And choose the just, pluperfect word.

Oh Muse, Thou wilt not now require
The task. Men change not at desire
Water to wine, and ink to fire!

Thou knowest, till the appointed pain
How comfortably in the brain
Unwritten madrigals remain.

Be patient, Lady! Ah, ere long,
Some evening, pure and purged and strong,
That Absolutely Deathless Song!

INSCRIPTION FOR A GRAMMAR

There were two cheerful pronouns
  And nought did them disturb:
Until they met, out walking.
  A conjugative verb.

The pronouns, child, were *You* and *I*,
  We might as well confess;
But, ah, the mischief-making verb
  I leave to you to guess!

THE EPIGRAM

To write an epic or a novel
  Seems straightforward work to me—
By conscientious indentation
  The beaver bevels down the tree;

But, with the imprecisive arrow
  The intended acorn fairly struck—
Such is epigram, requiring
  Wit, occasion, and good luck!

CRAYONS

You ask me how God felt on that first day.
I think I know:
With paper and a new box of bright crayons
I have felt just so—
The children pressing at each elbow
("Draw a sunset and a polar bear!")
. . . But even God was not so lucky—
He had no audience there.

FONS ET ORIGO

"What beaushul reindeers Daddy draws!"
Creators need applause,
And God made man merely to hear some praise
Of what He'd done on those Five Days.

LINES COMPOSED BEHIND THE BARN

One day, by some hazard odd,
A frightful truth fell with a thud.
But no one saw. It was a dud.
Thank God!

MRS. DILEMMA, NÉE MALAPROP

"I want a cornutation ticket,"
She said (a charming verbal slip).
The classicist behind the wicket:
"You flatter me, Madam. Fifty trip?"

INSCRIPTION FOR A TELEPHONE BOOTH

Jingle for nickels; twangle twice for dimes
(The caller hearkens in his humid grot),
But, oh, the rich and grave cathedral chimes
Of quarters tolling in their appointed slot!

ON THE MARGIN OF A WORK ON SOCIOLOGY

The virtue of the human race
Astonishes me. But scholars jab it—
They black the eye on Virtue's face
And call her Teleologic Habit.

AD PUELLAM MINUSCULAM

How to convey, describe, that furious note,
That piston-stroke of squalled reiteration
That issues from a two-months' infant's throat?
The immortal voice of human indignation!

A STAG DINNER

"Before the Deer be killed, he ought to be hunted and chafed as much as may be." SIR KENELM DIGBY

I love Sir Kenelm's old remark, it is an allegory:
So hasten, jolly hunting men, and chafe the flying quarry!

Lo, in the wildwoods of the mind there's royal game for venery,
And sport more brave than gathering eggs dropped for you in a hennery.

So ride the bramble-thickets through, with loud hulloa and cry,
And you shall have the steaming heart and bake a Humble Pie!

SCOTCH MIST

The happiness of children . . . do not speak
That nonsense where a parent may o'erhear—
He knows that still, on childhood's gayest cheek,
There lingers a bright tear.

EXPLANATION

They wonder why I love the rains and gales
And walk through puddles with a downward gaze—
I hunt the films of oil, like peacock's tails,
Dripped by gay taxis on the rainy days.

FULL AND BY

Many writers have "followed" the sea,
Loved it, cursed it, aye, and fought it;
But Joseph Conrad seems to me
The one who—very nearly—caught it.

ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY

Who is the most unhappy man?
The man who's sick? or poor? or lousy?
The one who always goes to bed
As soon as he is feeling drowsy.

A BUBBLE OF INK

I'd like to circle, with one bead of ink,
All poetry, all passion, the whole riddle,
Light as a spider's web . . . and still, I think,
There'd be an unsolved spider in the middle.

ALPHA AND OMEGA OF C. STOUT

Colophon Stout
Ran about and about:
He was always the victim of any loud shout.
He hunted for eagles
With a pack of beagles.

SOLVITUR AMBULANDO

"Loosegowns for Mackarell." . . .
Robin Herrick feared
His verses might but line fishmongers' kegs—
Not so. His feet to all men he endeared
By fitting them to Julia's ivory legs.

ROBERT HERRICK AT THE DENTIST

When dentists fill my mouth with those
Dry cotton wads, how swiftly flows
The liquefaction of my woes.

Next, when I cast mine eyes and see
That prong vibrating bold and free—
Oh, how that buzzer scareth me!

A FOIBLE FOR CRITICS

The critics criticise creators
  And prod, and try to make them squeak,
And call them very small potaters,
  And cuss their puerile technique.

The paradox by which I'm smitten
  Perhaps had better be confessed:
The things by these same critics written
  Are no bit better than the rest.

RAISED!

The poet on his bed lay low:
  His pulse was weak, the end was near;
Then leaned the wily medico
  And whispered sharply in his ear.

Revived, he rose with dreadful cry—
  These words had saved him from the hearse:
"They'll all begin (if you should die)
  To garble and misquote your verse."

THOUGHTS ON BEING INVITED TO DINNER

Of old, all invitations ended
  With the well-known *R. S. V. P.*,
But now our laws have been amended
  The hostess writes
B. Y. O. B.

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EPITAPH FOR ANY NEW YORKER

I, who all my life had hurried,
Came to Peter's crowded gate;
And, as usual, was worried,
Fearing that I might be late.
So, when I began to jostle
(I forgot that I was dead)
Patient smiled the old Apostle:
"Take your Eternity," he said.

SONGS FOR A LITTLE HOUSE

He that high growth on cedars did bestow,
Gave also lowly mushrumps leave to grow.
R. SOUTHWELL, 1562–95

TO THE LITTLE HOUSE

DEAR little house, dear shabby street,
Dear books and beds and food to eat!
How feeble words are to express
The facets of your tenderness.

How white the sun comes through the pane!
In tinkling music drips the rain!
How burning bright the furnace glows!
What paths to shovel when it snows!

O dearly loved Long Island trains!
O well remembered joys and pains. . . .
How near the housetops Beauty leans
Along that little street in Queens!

Let these poor rhymes abide for proof
Joy dwells beath a humble roof;
Heaven is not built of country seats
But little queer suburban streets!

BAYBERRY CANDLES

Dear sweet, when dusk comes up the hill,
  The fire leaps high with golden prongs;
I place along the chimneysill
  The tiny candles of my songs.

And though unsteadily they burn,
  As evening shades from grey to blue
Like candles they will surely learn
  To shine more clear, for love of you.

SECRET LAUGHTER

"I had a secret laughter."
WALTER DE LA MARE.

There is a secret laughter
  That often comes to me,
And though I go about my work
  As humble as can be,
There is no prince or prelate
  I envy—no, not one.
No evil can befall me—
  By God, I have a son!

A CHARM

FOR OUR NEW FIREPLACE,
TO STOP ITS SMOKING

O wood, burn bright; O flame, be quick;
O smoke, draw cleanly up the flue–
My lady chose your every brick
And sets her dearest hopes on you!

Logs cannot burn, nor tea be sweet,
Nor white bread turn to crispy toast,
Until the charm be made complete
By love, to lay the sooty ghost.

And then, dear books, dear waiting chairs,
Dear china and mahogany,
Draw close, for on the happy stairs
My brown-eyed girl comes down for tea!

SIX WEEKS OLD

He is so small, he does not know
The summer sun, the winter snow;
The spring that ebbs and comes again,
All this is far beyond his ken.

A little world he feels and sees:
His mother's arms, his mother's knees;
He hides his face against her breast,
And does not care to learn the rest.

THE 5:42

Lilac, violet, and rose
Ardently the city glows;
Sunset glory, purely sweet,
Gilds the dreaming byway-street,
And, above the Avenue,
Winter dusk is deepening blue.

(Then, across Long Island meadows,
Darker, darker, grow the shadows:
Patience, little waiting lass!
Laggard minutes slowly pass;
Patience, laughs the yellow fire:
Homeward bound is heart's desire!)

Hark, adown the canyon street
Flows the merry tide of feet;
High the golden buildings loom
Blazing in the purple gloom;
All the town is set with stars,
Homeward chant the Broadway cars!

All down Thirty-second Street
Homeward, Homeward, say the feet!
Tramping men, uncouth to view,
Footsore, weary, thrill anew;
Gone the ringing telephones,
Blessed nightfall now atones.
Casting brightness on the snow
Golden the train windows go.

Then (how long it seems) at last
All the way is overpast.
Heart that beats your muffled drum,
Lo, your venturer is come!
Wide the door! Leap high, O fire!
Home at length is heart's desire!
Gone is weariness and fret,
At the sill warm lips are met.
Once again may be renewed
The conjoined beatitude.

READING ALOUD

Once we read Tennyson aloud
In our great fireside chair;
Between the lines, my lips could touch
Her April-scented hair.

How very fond I was, to think
The printed poems fair,
When close within my arms I held
A living lyric there!

THE MOON-SHEEP

The moon seems like a docile sheep,
She pastures while all people sleep;
But sometimes, when she goes astray,
She wanders all alone by day.

Up in the clear blue morning air
We are surprised to see her there,
Grazing in her woolly white,
Waiting the return of night.

When dusk lets down the meadow bars
She greets again her lambs, the stars!

MAR QUONG, CHINESE LAUNDRYMAN

I like the Chinese laundryman:
He smokes a pipe that bubbles,
And seems, as far as I can tell,
A man with but few troubles.

He has much to do, no doubt,
But also, much to think about.

Most men (for instance I myself)
Are spending, at all times,
All our hard-earned quarters,
Our nickels and our dimes:
With Mar Quong it's the other way—
He takes in small change every day.

Next time you call for collars
In his steamy little shop,
Observe how tight his pigtail
Is coiled and piled on top.
But late at night he lets it hang
And thinks of the Yang-tse-kiang.

THE MILKMAN

Early in the morning, when the dawn is on the roofs,
You hear his wheels come rolling, you hear his horse's hoofs;
You hear the bottles clinking, and then he drives away:
You yawn in bed, turn over, and begin another day!

The old-time dairy maids are dear to every poet's heart—
I'd rather be the dairy *man* and drive a little cart,
And bustle round the village in the early morning blue.
And hang my reins upon a hook, as I've seen Casey do.

IN HONOUR OF TAFFY TOPAZ

Taffy, the topaz-coloured cat,
Thinks now of this and now of that,
But chiefly of his meals.
Asparagus, and cream, and fish,
Are objects of his Freudian wish;
What you don't give, he steals.

His gallant heart is strongly stirred
By clink of plate or flight of bird,
He has a plumy tail;
At night he treads on stealthy pad
As merry as Sir Galahad
A-seeking of the Grail.

His amiable amber eyes
Are very friendly, very wise;

Like Buddha, grave and fat,
He sits, regardless of applause,
And thinking, as he kneads his paws,
What fun to be a cat!

THE CEDAR CHEST

Her mind is like her cedar chest
Wherein in quietness do rest
The wistful dreamings of her heart
In fragrant folds all laid apart.

There, put away in sprigs of rhyme
Until her life's full blossom-time,
Flutter (like tremulous little birds)
Her small and sweet maternal words.

O PRAISE ME NOT THE COUNTRY

O praise me not the country—
The meadows green and cool,
The solemn glow of sunsets, the hidden silver pool!
The city for my craving,
Her lordship and her slaving,
The hot stones of her paving
For me, a city fool!

O praise me not the leisure
Of gardened country seats,
The fountains on the terrace against the summer heats—
The city for my yearning,
My spending and my earning.
Her winding ways for learning,
Sing hey! the city streets!

O praise me not the country,
Her sycamores and bees,
I had my youthful plenty of sour apple trees!
The city for my wooing,
My dreaming and my doing;
Her beauty for pursuing,
Her deathless mysteries.

O praise me not the country,
Her evenings full of stars,
Her yachts upon the water with the wind among their spars—
The city for my wonder,
Her glory and her blunder,
And O the haunting thunder
Of the Elevated cars!

ANIMAL CRACKERS

Animal crackers, and cocoa to drink,
That is the finest of suppers, I think;
When I'm grown up and can have what I please
I think I shall always insist upon these.

What do *you* choose when you're offered a treat?
When Mother says, "What would you like best to eat?"
Is it waffles and syrup, or cinnamon toast?
It's cocoa and animals that *I* love most!

The kitchen's the cosiest place that I know:
The kettle is singing, the stove is aglow,
And there in the twilight, how jolly to see
The cocoa and animals waiting for me.

Daddy and Mother dine later in state,
With Mary to cook for them, Susan to wait;
But they don't have nearly as much fun as I
Who eat in the kitchen with Nurse standing by;
And Daddy once said, he would like to be me
Having cocoa and animals once more for tea!

LIGHT VERSE

At night the gas lamps light our street,
  Electric bulbs our homes;
The gas is billed in cubic feet,
  Electric light in ohms.

But one illumination still
  Is brighter far, and sweeter;
It is not figured in a bill,
  Nor measured by a meter.

More bright than lights that money buys,
  More pleasing to discerners,
The shining lamps of Helen's eyes,
  Those lovely double burners!

WASHING THE DISHES

When we on simple rations sup
How easy is the washing up!
But heavy feeding complicates
The task by soiling many plates.

And though I grant that I have prayed
That we might find a serving-maid,
I'd scullion all my days, I think,
To see Her smile across the sink!

I wash, She wipes. In water hot
I souse each dish and pan and pot;
While Taffy mutters, purrs, and begs,
And rubs himself against my legs.

The man who never in his life
Has washed the dishes with his wife
Or polished up the silver plate—
He still is largely celibate.

One warning: there is certain ware
That must be handled with all care:
The Lord Himself will give you up
If you should drop a willow cup!

THE FURNACE

At night I opened
  The furnace door:
The warm glow brightened
  The cellar floor.

The fire that sparkled
  Blue and red,
Kept small toes cosy
  In their bed.

As up the stair
So late I stole,
I said my prayer:
Thank God for coal!

THE CHURCH OF UNBENT KNEES

As I went by the church to-day
I heard the organ cry;
And goodly folk were on their knees,
But I went striding by.

My minster hath a roof more vast:
My aisles are oak trees high;
My altar-cloth is on the hills,
My organ is the sky.

I see my rood upon the clouds,
The winds, my chanted choir;
My crystal windows, heaven-glazed,
Are stained with sunset fire.

The stars, the thunder, and the rain,
White sands and purple seas—
These are His pulpit and His pew,
My God of Unbent Knees!

THE MADONNA OF THE CURB

On the curb of a city pavement,
By the ash and garbage cans,
In the stench and rolling thunder
Of motor trucks and vans,
There sits my little lady,
With brave but troubled eyes,
And in her arms a baby
That cries and cries and cries.

She cannot be more than seven;
But years go fast in the slums,
And hard on the pains of winter
The pitiless summer comes.
The wail of sickly children
She knows; she understands
The pangs of puny bodies,
The clutch of small hot hands.

In the deadly blaze of August,
That turns men faint and mad,
She quiets the peevish urchins
By telling a dream she had—
A heaven with marble counters,
And ice, and a singing fan;
And a God in white, so friendly,
Just like the drug-store man.

Her ragged dress is dearer
  Than the perfect robe of a queen!
Poor little lass, who knows not
  The blessing of being clean.
And when you are giving millions
  To Belgian, Pole and Serb,
Remember my pitiful lady—
  Madonna of the Curb!

MY PIPE

My pipe is old
And caked with soot;
My wife remarks:
"How can you put
That horrid relic,
So unclean,
Inside your mouth?
The nicotine
Is strong enough
To stupefy
A Swedish plumber."
I reply:

"This is the kind
Of pipe I like:
I fill it full
Of Happy Strike,

Or Barking Cat
Or Cabman's Puff,
Or Brooklyn Bridge
(That potent stuff)
Or Chaste Embraces,
Knacker's Twist,
Old Honeycomb
Or Niggerfist.

I clamp my teeth
Upon its stem—
It is my bliss,
My diadem.
Whatever Fate
May do to me,
This is my favourite
  B
B B.
For this dear pipe
You feign to scorn
I smoked the night
The boy was born."

TO A GRANDMOTHER

At six o'clock in the evening,
The time for lullabies,
My son lay on my mother's lap
With sleepy, sleepy eyes!
(*O drowsy little manny boy,*
With sleepy, sleepy eyes!)

I heard her sing, and rock him,
And the creak of the swaying chair,
And the old dear cadence of the words
Came softly down the stair.

And all the years had vanished,
All folly, greed, and stain—
The old, old song, the creaking chair,
The dearest arms again!
(*O lucky little manny boy,*
To feel those arms again!)

PEDOMETER

My thoughts beat out in sonnets while I walk,
And every evening on the homeward street
I find the rhythm of my marching feet
Throbs into verses (though the rhyme may balk.)

I think the sonneteers were walking men:
The form is dour and rigid, like a clamp,
But with the swing of legs the tramp, tramp, tramp
Of syllables begins to thud, and then—
Lo! while you seek a rhyme for *hook* or *crook*
Vanished your shabby coat, and you are kith
To all great walk-and singers—Meredith,
And Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Keats, and Rupert
Brooke!
Free verse is poor for walking, but a sonnet
O marvellous to stride and brood upon it!

ARS DURA

How many evenings, walking soberly
Along our street all dappled with rich sun,
I please myself with words, and happily
Time rhymes to footfalls, planning how they run;
And yet, when midnight comes, and paper lies
Clean, white, receptive, all that one can ask,
Alas for drowsy spirit, weary eyes
And traitor hand that fails the well loved task!

Who ever learned the sonnet's bitter craft
But he had put away his sleep, his ease,
The wine he loved, the men with whom he laughed,
To brood upon such thankless tricks as these?
And yet, such joy does in that craft abide
He greets the paper as the groom the bride!

O. HENRY—APOTHECARY

("O. Henry" once worked in a drug-store in Greensboro, N. C.)

Where once he measured camphor, glycerine,
Quinine and potash, peppermint in bars,
And all the oils and essences so keen
That druggists keep in rows of stoppered jars—
Now, blender of strange drugs more volatile,
The master pharmacist of joy and pain
Dispenses sadness tinctured with a smile
And laughter that dissolves in tears again.

O brave apothecary! You who knew
What dark and acid doses life prefers,
And yet with friendly face resolved to brew
These sparkling potions for your customers—
In each prescription your Physician writ
You poured your rich compassion and your wit!

FOR THE CENTENARY OF KEATS'S SONNET (1816)

("On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer.")

I knew a scientist, an engineer,
Student of tensile strengths and calculus,
A man who loved a cantilever truss
And always wore a pencil on his ear.

My friend believed that poets all were queer,
And literary folk ridiculous;
But one night, when it chanced that three of us
Were reading Keats aloud, he stopped to hear.

Lo, a new planet swam into his ken!
His eager mind reached for it and took hold.
Ten years are by: I see him now and then,
And at alumni dinners, if cajoled,
He mumbles gravely, to the cheering men:—
Much have I travelled in the realms of gold.

TWO O'CLOCK

Night after night goes by: and clocks still chime
  And stars are changing patterns in the dark,
And watches tick, and over-puissant Time
  Benumbs the eager brain. The dogs that bark,
The trains that roar and rattle in the night,
  The very cats that prowl, all quiet find
And leave the darkness empty, silent quite:
  Sleep comes to chloroform the fretting mind.

So all things end: and what is left at last?
  Some scribbled sonnets tossed upon the floor,
A memory of easy days gone past,
  A run-down watch, a pipe, some clothes we
    wore—

And in the darkened room I lean to know
How warm her dreamless breath does pause and flow.

TO YOU, REMEMBERING THE PAST

When we were parted, sweet, and darkness came,
I used to strike a match, and hold the flame
Before your picture; and would breathless mark
The answering glimmer of the tiny spark
That brought to life the magic of your eyes,
Their wistful tenderness, their glad surprise.

Holding that mimic torch before your shrine
I used to light your eyes and make them mine;
Watch them like stars set in a lonely sky,
Whisper my heart out, yearning for reply;
Summon your lips from far across the sea
Bidding them live a twilight hour with me.

Then, when the match was shrivelled into gloom,
Lo—you were with me in the darkened room.

BALLAD OF NEW AMSTERDAM

There are no bowls on Bowling Green,
No maids in Maiden lane;
The river path to Greenwich
No longer doth remain.
No longer in the Bouwerie
Stands Peter Stuyvesant his tree!

And yet the Dutchmen built their dorp
With sturdy wit and will;
In Nassau street their spectral feet
Are heard to echo still.
In many places sure I am
New York is still Nieuw Amsterdam.

Sometimes at night in Bowling Green
There comes a rumbling sound,
Which literal minds are wont to think
The Subway. But I found
That still the Dutchmen ease their souls
By playing ghostly games of bowls!

CASUALTY

A well-sharp'd pencil leads one on to write:
When guns are cocked, the shot is guaranteed;
The primed occasion puts the deed in sight:
Who steals a book who knows not how to read?

Seeing a pulpit, who can silence keep?
A maid, who would not dream her ta'en to wife?
Men looking down from some sheer dizzy steep
Have (quite impromptu) leapt, and ended life.

AT THE WOMEN'S CLUBS

A representation of what happens when Mr. Dunraven Dulcet, the gifted poet, reads some of his verses to an audience of two hundred ladies and one man. After Mr. Dulcet has been introduced, and after he has expressed his mortification (or is it gratification?) at Madam Chairman's kind remarks, he proceeds as follows. The comments of his audience are indicated in italics.

Romance abides in humble things:—
How commonplace the precious ore!
The shining vision sometimes springs
The one man:
From too much cheese the night before!

The man who seeks the True Romance
Among the high aristocrats,
Forgets the crowning circumstance
Mrs. Smith:
My dear, he wears the sweetest spats!

Some little gutter-dabbling child,
Some shabby clerk whom all despise—
On him Olympus may have smiled
Mrs. Brown:
He has those dark romantic eyes!

Some shimmer from the lustred dawn
Of hitherto unguessed to-morrows,
Imperishable laurels drawn
Mrs. Jones:
I think he must have secret sorrows!

Immeasurable arcs of sky,
Vast spaces where the great winds shout,
His eye must pierce, his hand must try. . . .
Mrs. Robinson:
Too bad that he is growing stout!

His heart is like a parchment scroll
Whereon the beautiful, the true,
Are registered; and in his soul
Mrs. Smith:
I do love poetry, don't you?

Romance abides in humble things,
And humble people understand
That feathers from an angel's wings
Mrs. Brown:
I must just go and shake his hand!

ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY COAL-BIN

The furnace tolls the knell of falling steam,
  The coal supply is virtually done,
And at this price, indeed it does not seem
  As though we could afford another ton.

Now fades the glossy, cherished anthracite;
  The radiators lose their temperature:
How ill avail, on such a frosty night,
  The short and simple flannels of the poor.

Though in the ice-box, fresh and newly laid,
  The rude forefathers of the omelet sleep,
No eggs for breakfast till the bill is paid:
  We cannot cook again till coal is cheap.

Can Morris-chair or papier-mâché bust
  Revivify the failing pressure-gauge?
Chop up the grand piano if you must,
  And burn the East Aurora parrot-cage!

Full many a can of purest kerosene
  The dark unfathomed tanks of Standard Oil
Shall furnish me, and with their aid I mean
  To bring my morning coffee to a boil.

MOONS WE SAW AT SEVENTEEN

August casts her burning spell:
One vast sapphire is the sky;
Woods still have their musky smell,
By the pool the dragon fly
Like a jewelled scarf-pin glows.
Doris, Vera, and Kathleen—
Where are they? and where are those
Moons we saw at seventeen?

Bright as amber, and as round
As a new engagement ring—
(So we murmured, gently bound
To some flapper's leading string.)
Sweet and witless repartee:
Perilous canoes careen—
Telescopes would split, to see
MOONS we saw at seventeen!

AT THE DOG SHOW

(To an Irish Wolf Hound)

Long and grey and gaunt he lies,
A Lincoln among dogs; his eyes,
Deep and clear of sight, appraise
The meaningless and shuffling ways

Of human folk that stop to stare.
One witless woman seeing there
How tired, how contemptuous
He is of all the smell and fuss
Asks him, "Poor fellow, are you sick?"

Yea, sick, and weary to the quick
Of heat and noise from dawn to dark.
He will not even stoop to bark
His protest, like the lesser bred.
Would he might know, one gazer read
The wistful longing in his face,
The thirst for wind and open space
And stretch of limbs to him begrudged.
There came a little, dapper, fat
And bustling man, with cane and spat
And pearl-grey vest and derby hat—
Such were the judger and the judged!

THE OLD SWIMMER

I often wander on the beach
Where once, so brown of limb,
The biting air, the roaring surf
Summoned me to swim.

I see my old abundant youth
Where combers lean and spill,
And though I taste the foam no more
Other swimmers will.

Oh, good exultant strength to meet
The arching wall of green,
To break the crystal, swirl, emerge
Dripping, taut, and clean.

To climb the moving hilly blue,
To dive in ecstasy
And feel the salty chill embrace
Arm and rib and knee.

What brave and vanished laughter then
And tingling thighs to run,
What warm and comfortable sands
Dreaming in the sun.

The crumbling water spreads in snow,
The surf is hissing still,
And though I kiss the salt no more
Other swimmers will.

A GRUB STREET RECESSIONAL

O noble gracious English tongue
Whose fibres we so sadly twist,
For caitiff measures he has sung
Have pardon on the journalist.

For mumbled metre, leaden pun,
For slipshod rhyme, and lazy word,
Have pity on this graceless one—
Thy mercy on Thy servant, Lord!

The metaphors and tropes depart,
Our little clippings fade and bleach:
There is no virtue and no art
Save in straightforward Saxon speech.

Yet not in ignorance or spite,
Nor with Thy noble past forgot
We sinned: indeed we had to write
To keep a fire beneath the pot.

Then grant that in the coming time,
With inky hand and polished sleeve,
In lucid prose or honest rhyme
Some worthy task we may achieve—

Some pinnacled and marbled phrase,
Some lyric, breaking like the sea,
That we may learn, not hoping praise,
The gift of Thy simplicity.

THE ROCKING HORSE

That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble
Has cost thee mony a weary nibble!
ROBERT BURNS.

A GRACE BEFORE WRITING

THIS is a sacrament, I think!
Holding the bottle toward the light,
As blue as lupin gleams the ink:
May Truth be with me as I write!

That small dark cistern may afford
Reunion with some vanished friend,—
And with this ink I have just poured
May none but honest words be penned!

THE TRYST

According to tradition
The place where sweethearts meet
Is meadowland and hillside,
And not the city street.
Love lingers when you say it
By lake and moonlight glow:
The poets all O. K. it—
It may be better so!

And yet I keep my trysting
In the department stores:
I always wait for Emma
At the revolving doors.
It might dismay the poets,
And yet it's wholly true—
My heart leaps when I know it's
My Emma, pushing through!

It may be more romantic
By brook or waterfall,
Yet better meet on pavements
Than never meet at all:
I want no moon beguiling,
No dark and bouldered shore,
When I see Emma smiling
And twirling through the door!

THE FAT LITTLE PURSE

On Saturdays, after the baby
Is bathed, fed, and sleeping serene,
His mother, as quickly as may be,
Arranges the household routine.
She rapidly makes herself pretty
And leaves the young limb with his nurse,
Then gaily she starts for the city,
And with her the fat little purse.

She trips through the crowd at the station,
To the rendezvous spot where we meet,
And keeping her eyes from temptation,
She avoids the most windowy street!
She is off for the Weekly Adventure;
To her comrade for better and worse
She says, "Never mind, when you've spent your
Last bit, here's the fat little purse."

Apart, in her thrifty exchequer,
She has hidden what must not be spent:
Enough for the butcher and baker,
Katie's wages, and milkman, and rent;
But the rest of her brave little treasure
She is gleeful and prompt to disburse—
What a richness of innocent pleasure
Can come from her fat little purse!

But either by giving or buying,
The little purse does not stay fat—
Perhaps it's a ragged child crying,
Perhaps it's a "pert little hat."
And the bonny brown eyes that were brightened
By pleasures so quaint and diverse,
Look up at me, wistful and frightened,
To see such a thin little purse.

The wisest of all financiering
  Is that which is done by our wives:
By some little known profiteering
  They add twos and twos and make fives;
And, husband, if you would be learning
  The secret of thrift, it is terse:
Invest the great part of your earning
  In that little, fat little purse.

THE REFLECTION

I have not heard her voice, nor seen her face,
  Nor touched her hand;
And yet some echo of her woman's grace
  I understand.

I have no picture of her lovelihood,
  Her smile, her tint;
But that she is both beautiful and good
  I have true hint.

In all that my friend thinks and says, I see
  Her mirror true;
His thought of her is gentle; she must be
  All gentle too.

In all his grief or laughter, work or play,
  Each mood and whim,
How brave and tender, day by common day,
  She speaks through him!

Therefore I say I know her, be her face
  Or dark or fair—
For when he shows his heart's most secret place
  I see her there!

TO A POST-OFFICE INKWELL

How many humble hearts have dipped
In you, and scrawled their manuscript!
Have shared their secrets, told their cares,
Their curious and quaint affairs!

Your pool of ink, your scratchy pen,
Have moved the lives of unborn men,
And watched young people, breathing hard,
Put Heaven on a postal card.

THE BALLOON PEDDLER

Who is the man on Chestnut street
  With coloured toy balloons?
I see him with his airy freight
  On sunny afternoons—

A peddler of such lovely goods!
  The heart leaps to behold
His mass of bubbles, red and green
  And blue and pink and gold.

For sure that noble peddler man
  Hath antic merchandise:
His toys that float and swim in air
  Attract my eager eyes.
Perhaps he is a changeling prince
  Bewitched through magic moons
To tempt us solemn busy folk
  With meaningless balloons.

Beware, oh, valiant merchantman,
  Tread cautious on the pave!
Lest some day come some realist,
  Some haggard soul and grave,
A puritan efficientist
  Who deems thy toys a sin—
He'll stalk thee madly from behind
  And prick them with a pin!

THE TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

No Malory of old romance,
  No Crusoe tale, it seems to me,
Can equal in rich circumstance
  This telephone directory.

No ballad of fair ladies' eyes,
  No legend of proud knights and dames,
Can fill me with such bright surmise
  As this great book of numbered names!

How many hearts and lives unknown,
  Rare damsels pining for a squire,
Are waiting for the telephone
  To ring, and call them to the wire.

Some wait to hear a loved voice say
  The news they will rejoice to know
At Rome 2637 J
  Or Marathon 1450!

And some, perhaps, are stung with fear
  And answer with reluctant tread:
The message they expect to hear
  Means life or death or daily bread.

A million hearts here wait our call,
  All naked to our distant speech—
I wish that I could ring them all
  And have some welcome news for each!

THE ICE WAGON

I'd like to split the sky that roofs us down,
Break through the crystal lid of upper air,
And tap the cool still reservoirs of heaven.
I'd empty all those unseen lakes of freshness
Down some vast funnel, through our stifled streets.

I'd like to pump away the grit, the dust,
Raw dazzle of the sun on garbage piles,
The droning troops of flies, sharp bitter smells,
And gush that bright sweet flood of unused air
Down every alley where the children gasp.

And then I'd take a fleet of ice wagons—
Big yellow creaking carts, drawn by wet horses,—
And drive them rumbling through the blazing slums.
In every wagon would be blocks of coldness,
Pale, gleaming cubes of ice, all green and silver,
With inner veins and patterns, white and frosty;
Great lumps of chill would drip and steam and shimmer,
And spark like rainbows in their little fractures.

And where my wagons stood there would be puddles,
A wetness and a sparkle and a coolness.

My friends and I would chop and splinter open
The blocks of ice. Bare feet would soon come pattering,
And some would wrap it up in Sunday papers,
And some would stagger home with it in baskets,
And some would be too gay for aught but sucking,
Licking, crunching those fast melting pebbles,
Gulping as they slipped down unexpected—
Laughing to perceive that secret numbness
Amid their small hot persons!

At every stop would be at least one urchin
Would take a piece to cool the sweating horses
And hold it up against their silky noses—
And they would start, and then decide they liked it.

Down all the sun-cursed byways of the town
Our wagons would be trailed by grimy tots,
Their ragged shirts half off them with excitement!
Dabbling toes and fingers in our leakage,
A lucky few up sitting with the driver,
All clambering and stretching grey-pink palms.

And by the time the wagons were all empty
Our arms and shoulders would be lame with chopping,
Our backs and thighs pain-shot, our fingers frozen.
But how we would recall those eager faces,
Red thirsty tongues with ice-chips sliding on them,

The pinched white cheeks, and their pathetic
gladness.
Then we would know that arms were made for
aching—

I wish to God that I could go to-morrow!

AT A MOVIE THEATRE

How well he spoke who coined the phrase
The picture palace! Aye, in sooth
A palace, where men's weary days
Are crowned with kingliness of youth.

Strange palace! Crowded, airless, dim,
Where toes are trod and strained eyes smart,
We watch a wand of brightness limn
The old heroics of the heart.

Romance again hath us in thrall
And Love is sweet and always true,
And in the darkness of the hall
Hands clasp—as they were meant to do.

Remote from peevish joys and ills
Our souls, *pro tem*, are purged and free:
We see the sun on western hills,
The crumbling tumult of the sea.

We are the blond that maidens crave,
  Well balanced at a dozen banks;
By sleight of hand we haste to save
  A brown-eyed life, nor stay for thanks!

Alas, perhaps our instinct feels
  Life is not all it might have been,
So we applaud fantastic reels
  Of shadow, cast upon a screen!

SONNETS IN A LODGING HOUSE

I

Each morn she crackles upward, tread by tread,
  All apprehensive of some hideous sight:
Perhaps the Fourth Floor Back, who reads in bed,
  Forgot his gas and let it burn all night—
The Sweet Young Thing who has the middle room,
  She much suspects: for once some ink was spilled,
And then the plumber, in an hour of gloom,
  Found all the bathroom pipes with tea-leaves filled.

No League of Nations scheme can make her gay—
  She knows the rank duplicity of man;
Some folks expect clean towels every day,
  They'll get away with murder if they can!

She tacks a card (alas, few roomers mind it)
Please leave the tub as you would wish to find it!

II

Men lodgers are the best, the Mrs. said:
They don't use my gas jets to fry sardines,
They don't leave red-hot irons on the spread,
They're out all morning, when a body cleans.
A man ain't so secretive, never cares
What kind of private papers he leaves lay,
So I can get a line on his affairs
And dope out whether he is likely pay.
But women! Say, they surely get my bug!
They stop their keyholes up with chewing gum,
Spill grease, and hide the damage with the rug,
And toast marshmallows when their callers come.
They always are behindhand with their rents—
Take my advice and let your rooms to gents!

DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE GOD?

Across the court there rises the back wall
Of the Magna Carta Apartments.
The other evening the people in the apartment opposite
Had forgotten to draw their curtains.
I could see them dining: the well-blanched cloth,
The silver and glass, the crystal water jug,

The meat and vegetables; and their clean pink hands
Outstretched in busy gesture.

It was pleasant to watch them, they were so human;
So gay, innocent, unconscious of scrutiny.
They were four: an elderly couple,
A young man, and a girl—with lovely shoulders
Mellow in the glow of the lamp.
They were sitting over coffee, and I could see their hands talking.

At last the older two left the room.
The boy and girl looked at each other. . . .
Like a flash, they leaned and kissed.

Good old human race that keeps on multiplying!
A little later I went down the street to the movies,
And there I saw all four, laughing and joking together.
And as I watched them I felt like God—
Benevolent, all-knowing, and tender.

THE MAN WITH THE HOE (PRESS)

About these roaring cylinders
  Where leaping words and paper mate,
A sudden glory moves and stirs—
  An inky cataract in spate!

What voice for falsehood or for truth,
  What hearts attentive to be stirred—
How dimly understood, in sooth,
  The power of the printed word!

These flashing webs and cogs of steel
  Have shaken empires, routed kings,
Yet never turn too fast to feel
  The tragedies of humble things.

O words, be strict in honesty,
  Be just and simple and serene;
O rhymes, sing true, or you will be
  Unworthy of this great machine.

GREEN ESCAPE

At three o'clock in the afternoon
  On a hot September day,
I began to dream of a highland stream
  And a frostbit russet tree;

Of the swashing dip of a clipper ship
(White canvas wet with spray)
And the swirling green and milk-foam clean
Along her canted lee.

I heard the quick staccato click
Of the typist's pounding keys,
And I had to brood of a wind more rude
Than that by a motor fanned—
And I lay inert in a flannel shirt
To watch the rhyming seas
Deploy and fall in a silver sprawl
On a beach of sun-blanched sand.

There is no desk shall tame my lust
For hills and windy skies;
My secret hope of the sea's blue slope
No clerkly task shall dull;
And though I print no echoed hint
Of adventures I devise,
My eyes still pine for the comely line
Of an outbound vessel's hull.

When I elope with an autumn day
And make my green escape,
I'll leave my pen to tamer men
Who have more docile souls;

For forest aisles and office files
  Have a very different shape,
And it's hard to woo the ocean blue
  In a row of pigeon holes!

VESPER SONG FOR COMMUTERS

(Instead of "Marathon," the commuter may substitute the name of his favourite suburb)

The stars are kind to Marathon,
How low, how close, they lean!
They jostle one another
And do their best to please—
Indeed, they are so neighbourly
That in the twilight green
One reaches out to pick them
Behind the poplar trees.

The stars are kind to Marathon,
And one particular
Bright planet (which is Vesper)
Most lucid and serene,
Is waiting by the railway bridge,
The Good Commuter's Star,
The Star of Wise Men coming home
On time, at 6:15!

THE SECRET

It was the House of Quietness
To which I came at dusk;
The garth was lit with roses
And heavy with their musk.

The tremulous tall poplar trees
Stood whispering around,
The gentle flicker of their plumes
More quiet than no sound.

And as I wondered at the door
What magic might be there,
The Lady of Sweet Silences
Came softly down the stair.

DEDICATION FOR A FIREPLACE

This hearth was built for thy delight,
For thee the logs were sawn,
For thee the largest chair, at night,
Is to the chimney drawn.

For thee, dear lass, the match was lit
To yield the ruddy blaze—
May Jack Frost give us joy of it
For many, many days.

ON NAMING A HOUSE

When I a householder became
I had to give my house a name.

I thought I'd call it "Poplar Trees,"
Or "Widdershins" or "Velvet Bees,"
Or "Just Beneath a Star."
I thought of "House Where Plumbings Freeze,"
Or "As You Like It," "If You Please,"
Or "Nicotine" or "Bread and Cheese,"
"Full Moon" or "Doors Ajar."

But still I sought some subtle charm,
Some rune to guard my roof from harm
And keep the devil far;
I thought of this, and I was saved!
I had my letter-heads engraved
The House Where Brown Eyes Are.

REFUSING YOU IMMORTALITY

If I should tell, unstinted,
Your beauty and your grace.
All future lads would whisper
Traditions of your face;

If I made public tumult
  Your mirth, your queenly state,
Posterity would grumble
  That it was born too late.

I will not frame your beauty
  In bright undying phrase,
Nor blaze it as a legend
  For unborn men to praise—
For why should future lovers
  Be saddened and depressed?
Deluded, let them fancy
  Their own girls loveliest!

LINES FOR AN ECCENTRIC'S BOOK PLATE

To use my books all friends are bid:
  My shelves are open for 'em;
And in each one, as Grolier did,
  I write *Et Amicorum.*

All lovely things in truth belong
  To him who best employs them;
The house, the picture and the song,
  Are his who most enjoys them.

Perhaps this book holds precious lore,
  And you may best discern it.
If you appreciate it more
  Than I—why don't return it!

THE CRIB

I sought immortality
  Here and there—
I sent my rockets
  Into the air:
I gave my name
  A hostage to ink;
I dined a critic
  And bought him drink.

I spurned the weariness
  Of the flesh;
Denied fatigue
  And began afresh—
If men knew all,
  How they would laugh!
I even planned
  My epitaph. . . .

And then one night
When the dusk was thin
I heard the nursery
Rites begin:
I heard the tender
Soothings said
Over a crib, and
A small sweet head.

Then in a flash
It came to me
That there was my
Immortality!

THE POET

The barren music of a word or phrase,
The futile arts of syllable and stress,
He sought. The poetry of common days
He did not guess.

The simplest, sweetest rhythms life affords—
Unselfish love, true effort truly done,
The tender themes that underlie all words—
He knew not one.

The human cadence and the subtle chime
Of little laughters, home and child and wife,
He knew not Artist merely in his rhyme,
Not in his life.

TO A DISCARDED MIRROR

Dear glass, before your silver pane
My lady used to tend her hair;
And yet I search your disc in vain
To find some shadow of her there.

I thought your magic, deep and bright
Might still some dear reflection hold
Some glint of eyes or shoulders white,
Some flash of gowns she wore of old.

Your polished round must still recall
The laughing face, the neck like snow—
Remember, on your lonely wall,
That Helen used you long ago!

TO A VERY YOUNG GENTLEMAN

My child, what painful vistas are before you!
What years of youthful ills and pangs and bumps—
Indignities from aunts who "just adore" you,
And chicken-pox and measles, croup and mumps!
I don't wish to dismay you,—it's not fair to,
Promoted now from bassinet to crib,—
But, O my babe, what troubles flesh is heir to
Since God first made so free with Adam's rib!

Laboriously you will proceed with teething;
When teeth are here, you'll meet the dentist's chair;
They'll teach you ways of walking, eating, breathing,
That stoves are hot, and how to brush your hair;
And so, my poor, undaunted little stripling,
By bruises, tears, and trousers you will grow,
And, borrowing a leaf from Mr. Kipling,
I'll wish you luck, and moralise you so:

If you can think up seven thousand methods
Of giving cooks and parents heart disease;
Can rifle pantry-shelves, and then give death odds
By water, fire, and falling out of trees;

If you can fill your every boyish minute
With sixty seconds' worth of mischief done,
Yours is the house and everything that's in it,
And, which is more, you'll be your father's son!

FOR A BIRTHDAY

At two years old the world he sees
Must seem expressly made to please!
Such new-found words and games to try,
Such sudden mirth, he knows not why,
So many curiosities!

As life about him, by degrees
Discloses all its pageantries
He watches with approval shy
At two years old.

With wonders tired he takes his ease
At dusk, upon his mother's knees:
A little laugh, a little cry,
Put toys to bed, then "seepy-bye"—
The world is made of such as these
At two years old.

SMELLS

Why is it that the poets tell
So little of the sense of smell?
These are the odours I love well:

The smell of coffee freshly ground;
Or rich plum pudding, holly crowned;
Or onions fried and deeply browned.

The fragrance of a fumy pipe;
The smell of apples, newly ripe;
And printers' ink on leaden type.

Woods by moonlight in September
Breathe most sweet; and I remember
Many a smoky camp-fire ember.

Camphor, turpentine, and tea,
The balsam of a Christmas tree,
These are whiffs of gramarye. . . .
A ship smells best of all to me!

SMELLS (JUNIOR)

My Daddy smells like tobacco and books,
  Mother, like lavender and listerine;
Uncle John carries a whiff of cigars,
  Nannie smells starchy and soapy and clean.

Shandy, my dog, has a smell of his own
(When he's been out in the rain he smells most);
But Katie, the cook, is more splendid than all—
She smells exactly like hot buttered toast!

MY FAVOURITE FLOWERS

The yellow orchid why discuss,
When you can *eat* asparagus!
What stained-glass window could repeat
The red-veined leafage of the beet?

What delicately mottled green
Is in the humble, honest bean,
And what a balm for sin and grief
The crisp and curly lettuce leaf!

The corn, in green, translucent files,
Shimmers like cathedral aisles,
The cabbage that the frost has touched
Is like a pigeon's throat unsmutched.

An onion, if you hold your nose,
Is marvellous as any rose!

THE PLUMPUPPETS

When little heads weary have gone to their bed,
When all the good-nights and the prayers have been said,
Of all the good fairies that send bairns to rest
The little Plumpuppets are those I love best.

If your pillow is lumpy, or hot, thin and flat,
The little Plumpuppets know just what they're at;
They plump up the pillow, all soft, cool and fat—
The little Plumpuppets plump-up it!

The little Plumpuppets are fairies of beds:
They have nothing to do but to watch sleepy heads;
They turn down the sheets and they tuck you in tight,
And they dance on your pillow to wish you good-night!

No matter what troubles have bothered the day,
Though your doll broke her arm or the pup ran away;
Though your handies are black with the ink that was spilt—
Plumpuppets are waiting in blanket and quilt.

If your pillow is lumpy, or hot, thin and flat,
The little Plumpuppets know just what they're at;
They plump up the pillow, all soft, cool and fat—
The little Plumpuppets plump-up it!

DANDY DANDELION

When Dandy Dandelion wakes
And combs his yellow hair,
The ant his cup of dewdrop takes
And sets his bed to air;
The worm hides in a quilt of dirt
To keep the thrush away,
The beetle dons his pansy shirt—
They know that it is day!

And caterpillars haste to milk
The cowslips in the grass;
The spider, in his web of silk,
Looks out for flies that pass.
These humble people leap from bed,
They know the night is done:
When Dandy spreads his golden head
They think he is the sun!

Dear Dandy truly does not smell
As sweet as some bouquets;
No florist gathers him to sell,
He withers in a vase;

Yet in the grass he's emperor.
And lord of high renown;
And grateful little folk adore
His bright and shining crown.

SONG FOR A LITTLE HOUSE

I'm glad our house is a little house,
Not too tall nor too wide:
I'm glad the hovering butterflies
Feel free to come inside.

Our little house is a friendly house,
It is not shy or vain;
It gossips with the talking trees,
And makes friends with the rain.

And quick leaves cast a shimmer of green
Against our whited walls,
And in the phlox, the courteous bees
Are paying duty calls.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

Not long ago I fell in love,
But unreturned is my affection—
The girl that I'm enamored of
Pays little heed in my direction.

I thought I knew her fairly well:
  In fact, I'd had my arm around her;
And so it's hard to have to tell
  How unresponsive I have found her.

For, though she is not frankly rude,
  Her manners quite the wrong way rub me:
It seems to me ingratitude
  To let me love her—and then snub me!

Though I'm considerate and fond,
  She shows no gladness when she spies me—
She gazes off somewhere beyond
  And doesn't even recognise me.

Her eyes, so candid, calm and blue,
  Seem asking if I can support her
In the style appropriate to
  A lady like her father's daughter.

Well, if I can't, then no one can—
  And let me add that I intend to:
She'll never know another man
  So fit for her to be a friend to.

Not love me, eh? She better had!
  By Jove, I'll make her love me one day;
For, don't you see, I am her Dad,
  And she'll be three weeks old on Sunday!

PARADISE DEPRECATED

When the faucets all stop dripping
And the bathtub never leaks;
When the house has weatherstripping
Against the blizzard weeks;
When the piping never freezes
And plumbers cease to plumb,
When every prospect pleases
And we clean by vacuum—

When wallpaper never blisters
And plaster does not fall,
When larcenous laundry sisters
Plunder us not at all;
When kitchen maids don't mutter
And tablecloths show no stain,
And husbands never utter
A single word profane—

When the rugs are never faded
And eggs go down in price;
When pantries are not raided
By children or by mice—
Then wives will never be weary,
Commuters will all grow fat:
But heavens! it would be dreary
To live in a house like that!

A HALLOWE'EN MEMORY

Do you remember, Heart's Desire,
  The night when Hallowe'en first came?
The newly dedicated fire,
  The hearth unsanctified by flame?

How anxiously we swept the bricks
  (How tragic, were the draught not right!)
And then the blaze enwrapped the sticks
  And filled the room with dancing light.

We could not speak, but only gaze,
  Nor half believe what we had seen—
Our home, *our* hearth, *our* golden blaze,
  Our cider mugs, *our* Hallowe'en!

And then a thought occurred to me—
  We ran outside with sudden shout
And looked up at the roof, to see
  Our own dear smoke come drifting out.

And of all man's felicities
  The very subtlest one, say I,
Is when for the first time he sees
  His hearthfire smoke against the sky.

THE LAST CRICKET

When the bulb of the moon with white fire fills
  And dead leaves crackle under the feet,
When men roll kegs to the cider mills
  And chestnuts roast on every street;

When the night sky glows like a hollow shell
  Of lustred emerald and pearl,
The kilted cricket knows too well
  His doom. His tiny bagpipes skirl.

Quavering under the polished stars
  In stubble, thicket, and frosty copse
The cricket blows a few choked bars,
  And puts away his pipe—and stops.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Our hearts to-night are open wide,
The grudge, the grief, are laid aside:
  The path and porch are swept of snow,
  The doors unlatched; the hearthstones glow—
No visitor can be denied.

All tender human homes must hide
Some wistfulness beneath their pride:
  Compassionate and humble grow
    Our hearts to-night.

Let empty chair and cup abide!
Who knows? Some well-remembered stride
  May come as once so long ago—
  Then welcome, be it friend or foe!
There is no anger can divide
    Our hearts to-night.

THE BIRTHDAY REVIEW

(May 6, 1918)

Said the Prince, "This is my birthday:
  Day for wasp-waist, sword and stars!
Let it be a feast and mirth-day—
  Muster my Death's Head Hussars!"

Southward to the blue Swiss border,
  North to Flemish sand-dunes pale,
Ran the Prince's birthday order,
  "Skull and Crossbones, zu Befehl!"

Meanwhile, he put on his frock of
  Whalebone, tinsel, gilded braids—
Garments that had borne the shock of
  Many glittering parades.

Clomb the tallest of his stallions
  Ready for his martial stunt;
Waiting for his proud battalions,
  Playboy of the Western Front.

To the great reviewing stand he
  Cantered, and his aides devloyed—
Angrily the royal dandy
  Gazed about him, much annoyed.

"Where are all my men?" he thundered
  "Did I not give orders strict?"
Uniformed attachés wondered;
  Heels of sub-lieutenants clicked.

Then, from trench and field blood-weary,
  And from hamlets black with scars,
Came dead voices, thin and eerie,
  Spoke the Prince's lost Hussars:

"I am here where Verdun held us."
  "In a shattered trench I lie."
"I, where Joffre's legions felled us."
  "I, and I, and I, and I."

"I am where the great guns slew us."
  "At Bapaume death set me free."
"I, where men in blue went through us—
  They no braver men than we."

"I am here where Haig defied us."
  "I, where England stood at bay."
"British dead are thick beside us,
  We no braver men than they."

"I, on Kemmel, where war squanders
All that honest men desire."
"I lie here in muddy Flanders
On a trench's clotted wire."

"Come, Commander, what you covet
We have bought you, flesh and soul—
This is war; and since you love it,
Join us, fill our muster-roll."

On the broad parade ground, waiting
In his coat of braid and stars,
Stood the Crown Prince, celebrating,
Last of the Death's Head Hussars.

THE ISLAND

A song for England?
Nay, what is a song for England?

Our hearts go by green-cliffed Kinsale
Among the gulls' white wings,
Or where, on Kentish forelands pale
The lighthouse beacon swings:
Our hearts go up the Mersey's tide,
Come in on Suffolk foam—
The blood that will not be denied
Moves fast, and calls us home!

Our hearts now walk a secret round
On many a Cotswold hill,
For we are mixed of island ground,
The island draws us still:
Our hearts may pace a windy turn
Where Sussex downs are high,
Or watch the lights of London burn,
A bonfire in the sky!

What is the virtue of that soil
That flings her strength so wide?
Her ancient courage, patient toil,
Her stubborn wordless pride?
A little land, yet loved therein
As any land may be,
Rejoicing in her discipline,
The salt stress of the sea.

Our hearts shall walk a Sherwood track,
Our lips taste English rain,
We thrill to see the Union Jack
Across some deep-sea lane;
Though all the world be of rich cost
And marvellous with worth,
Yet if that island ground were lost
How empty were the earth!

A song for England?
Lo, every word we speak's a song for England.

THE TREES

The poplar is a French tree,
A tall and laughing wench tree,
A slender tree, a tender tree,
That whispers to the rain—
An easy, breezy flapper tree,
A lithe and blithe and dapper tree,
A girl of trees, a pearl of trees,
Beside the shallow Aisne.

The oak is a British tree,
And not at all a skittish tree:
A rough tree, a tough tree,
A knotty tree to bruise;
A drives-his-roots-in-deep tree,
A what-I-find-I-keep tree,
A mighty tree, a Blighty tree,
A tree of stubborn thews.

The pine tree is our own tree,
A grown tree, a cone tree,
The tree to face a bitter wind,
The tree for mast and spar—
A mountain tree, a fine tree,
A fragrant turpentine tree,
A limber tree, a timber tree,
And resinous with tar!

THE TRUCE

Why do men speak with bated breath
Of this strange truce that they call Death?
Death is not Life's antithesis,
It may be but an armistice.
What is Death's analogue on earth?
It is not Life, but rather Birth.
Men fear not to be born; then why
Should they be so alarmed to die?

REQUIEM, ON DISCARDING AN OLD SUIT

Farewell, a long farewell, to my old breeches!
Farewell, sweet shabby coat and soup-stained vest!
Farewell, dear trousers, patched with careful stitches!
The good old suit, my wife says, has "gone West."

These trousers which (my dear) you say disgraced me—
Which "furnace men would be too proud to wear"—
For twelve long months they lovingly embraced me.
When shall I see again so fine a pair?

They were the colour of tobacco ashes
(A pipe could never harm such pantaloons).
And they were camouflaged with stains and splashes,
Fond souvenir of feats with forks and spoons.

I knew by heart which pockets could be trusted,
And which let small change vanish through a hole;
Though ragged, baggy, wrinkled, mud-encrusted,
If ever breeks do, those breeks had a soul!

And now, dolled up in crass new coat and trousers,
Ashamed and sad, I pace the lonely street,
Unhappy in my finery, for now, sirs,
My friends will never know me when we meet!

THE NIGHT BEFORE PAYDAY

'Twas the night before payday, and all through my jeans
I hunted in vain for the price of some beans.
Not a quarter was stirring, not even a jit;
The kale was off duty, milled edges had quit.
Forward, turn forward, O Time, in thy flight—
Make it to-morrow, just for to-night!

EPITAPH ON THE PROOFREADER OF THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA

Majestic tomes, you are the tomb
Of Aristides Edward Bloom,
Who laboured, from the world aloof,
In reading every page of proof.

From A to And, from Aus to Bis
Enthusiasm still was his;
From Cal to Cha, from Cha to Con
His soft-lead pencil still went on.

But reaching volume Fra to Gib,
He knew at length that he was sib
To Satan; and he sold his soul
To reach the section Pay to Pol.

Then Pol to Ree, and Shu to Sub
He staggered on, and sought a pub.
And just completing Vet to Zym,
The motor hearse came round for him.

He perished, obstinately brave:
They laid the Index on his grave.

JOHN J. HARRISON

John J. Harrison—peace to his head!—
Had one passion, and that was bed.
Truly he counted the day ill-spent
Unless by nine to the hay he went.

My, how he loved, on a winter's night,
To turn down the coverlet, tuck up tight,
And lie, like the beautiful girl in Keats,
A little bit goose-fleshed, between cold sheets.

Buried by blanket and padded quilt,
Many a castle in Spain he built;
Nestled and snuggled and spread his toes,
And just evaporated into repose.

John J. Harrison wisely deemed
That sleep can never be overesteemed,
And a twelve-hour night, on good wire springs,
Is something rare in the lives of kings.

The passion that most men bestow
On golf or cards or tit-tat-toe,
On the other sex, or baseball scores,
J. J. H. put in on snores.

Oh! that man made sleep a career;
He would lie and pound his ear
Eighty Ostermoor hours a week—
What do you think of that technique?

I, as his roommate, had often chidden
Him for being so bedridden:
It looked to me like a certain sign
Of horizontality of the spine!

John's sleepmeter would mew and buzz,
But never could lure him out of the fuzz.
At eight o'clock, when to work I went,
John would register great content.

"Sleep," he said, "appeals to me,
So I take it seriously:
I could slumber forever, old pup—
Sleep and sleep, and *never* wake up."

He was a man I so admired
That I helped him to what he desired:
What he wanted was what he got—
I put a rattlesnake in his cot.

BALLADE OF DROWSINESS

I heard a young efficiency expert
  Remark, "A man should never sleep by day."
When I heard this I felt a trifle hurt:
  A nap *does* help to pass the time away!
  Upon the filing case my head I lay,
    Massage my soul with slumber long and deep—
  I must have been compact of drowsy clay
    For nothing rests me quite as much as sleep.

The boss has sometimes made a comment curt,
  And says he will abbreviate my pay,
Then I have tried to make a valiant spurt
  And keep the dear old Lethargy at bay.
  No use! my mind is heavy as a dray,
    I never need to count a row of sheep.
  Upon my rolltop desk I hit the hay,
    For nothing rests me quite as much as sleep.

Stenographers have waited, all alert,
  To hear what grave dictation I might say—
Then suddenly my form becomes inert
  And I collapse (to their intense dismay).
  Though I have drunk black coffee by the tray
    My vital tide won't rise above the neap.
  Upon my spine my head begins to sway—
    For nothing rests me quite as much as sleep.

ENVOY

No pillow, I with confidence assert,
Can beat three phone books piled up in a heap.
Siestas should be public and overt,
For nothing rests me quite as much as sleep.

THANKSGIVING FOR HAVING OVERSLEPT

To-day, my friends, I overslept
And woke at half-past eight;
I reached the office where I'm kept
About two hours late.

I worked all morning breakfastless,
Made my digestion grieve;
The boss, unless I miss my guess,
Has thunder up his sleeve.

But I'm glad I was indolent!
The memory still glows—
Life cannot steal that increment
Of sweet unearned repose!

What though the time-clock will deduct
Two hours? it will be cheap—
The whole damned universe I bucked
And got a raise of sleep!

BALLADE OF GETTING ONE'S FEET WET

I often thought, when I was small,
How most delightful it would be
To go out walking in a squall
And tramp in puddles for a spree;
But if I did so, brief the glee—
I knew the old familiar threat:
"You'll have to change *immediately*—
Good gracious me, your feet are wet!"

They used to catch me in the hall
And then and there examine me—
Investigation to appal
The bravest boy, you will agree!
And if, between my shoe and knee
The slightest patch of damp was met,
Though I called Dad for referee,
"Good gracious me, your feet are wet!"

Of no avail to bluster, bawl,
Or to attempt some specious plea,
But I would think (I now recall)
"When I'm grown up I will be free"—

Alas for human fallacy!
The old dominion sways me yet:
On rainy days my wife, says she,
"Good gracious me, your feet are wet!"

ENVOY

This is the thing men may not flee,
The thing no womenfolk forget—
Some day my grandchild will decree
"Good gracious me, your feet are wet!"

HIDE AND SEEK

There be some whose pleasure is to seek Truth; others whose merriment is to hide her or trick her out in freakish guise. Of both sorts much may be said; yet meseems that a man may well speak plain sooth at times.

JOHN MISTLETOE.

TO H. F. M.

A SONNET IN SUNLIGHT

THIS is a day for sonnets: Oh how clear
Our splendid cliffs and summits lift the gaze—
If all the perfect moments of the year
Were poured and gathered in one sudden blaze,
Then, then perhaps, in some endowered phrase
My flat, strewn words would rise and come more near
To tell of you. Your beauty and your praise
Would fall like sunlight on this paper here.

Then I would build a sonnet that would stand
Proud and perennial on this pale bright sky;
So tall, so steep, that it might stay the hand
Of Time, the dusty wrecker. He would sigh
To tear my strong words down. And he would say:
"That song he built for her, one summer day."

TAKING TITLE

To make this house my very own
Could not be done by law alone.

Though covenant and deed convey
Absolute fee, as lawyers say,
There are domestic rites beside
By which this house is sanctified.

By kindled fire upon the hearth,
By planted pansies in the garth,
By food, and by the quiet rest
Of those brown eyes that I love best,
And by a friend's bright gift of wine,
I dedicate this house of mine.

When all but I are soft abed
I trail about my quiet stead
A wreath of blue tobacco smoke
(A charm that evil never broke)
And bring my ritual to an end
By giving shelter to a friend.

These done, O dwelling, you become
Not just a house, but truly Home!

TO AN OLD-FASHIONED POET

(Lizette Woodworth Reese)

Most tender poet, when the gods confer
  They save your gracile songs a nook apart,
And bless with Time's untainted lavender
  The ageless April of your singing heart.

You, in an age unbridled, ne'er declined
The appointed patience that the Muse decrees,
Until, deep in the flower of the mind
The hovering words alight, like bridegroom bees.

By casual praise or casual blame unstirred
The placid gods grant gifts where they belong:
To you, who understand, the perfect word,
The recompensed necessities of song.

BURNING LEAVES IN SPRING

When withered leaves are lost in flame
Their eddying ghosts, a thin blue haze,
Blow through the thickets whence they came
On amberlucent autumn days.

The cool green woodland heart receives
Their dim, dissolving, phantom breath
In young hereditary leaves
They see their happy life-in-death.

My minutes perish as they glow—
Time burns my crazy bonfire through;
But ghosts of blackened hours still blow,
Eternal Beauty, back to you!

BURNING LEAVES, NOVEMBER

These are folios of April,
  All the library of spring,
Missals gilt and rubricated
  With the frost's illumining.

Ruthless, we destroy these treasures,
  Set the torch with hand profane—
Gone, like Alexandrian vellums,
  Like the books of burnt Louvain!

Yet these classics are immortal:
  O collectors, have no fear,
For the publisher will issue
  New editions every year.

THE SAVAGE

Civilization causes me
Alternate fits: disgust and glee.

Buried in piles of glass and stone
My private spirit moves alone,

Where every day from eight to six
I keep alive by hasty tricks.

But I am simple in my soul;
My mind is sullen to control.

At dusk I smell the scent of earth,
And I am dumb—too glad for mirth.

I know the savours night can give,
And then, and then, I live, I live!

No man is wholly pure and free,
For that is not his destiny,

But though I bend, I will not break:
And still be savage, for Truth's sake.

God damns the easily convinced
(Like Pilate, when his hands he rinsed).

ST. PAUL'S AND WOOLWORTH

I stood on the pavement
  Where I could admire
Behind the brown chapel
  The cream and gold spire.

Above, gilded Lightning
  Swam high on his ball—
I saw the noon shadow
  The church of St. Paul.

And was there a meaning?
(My fancy would run),
Saint Paul in the shadow,
Saint Frank in the sun!

ADVICE TO A CITY

O city, cage your poets! Hem them in
And roof them over from the April sky—
Clatter them round with babble, ceaseless din,
And drown their voices with your thunder cry.

Forbid their free feet on the windy hills,
And harness them to daily ruts of stone—
(In florist's windows lock the daffodils)
And never, never let them be alone!

For they are curst, said poets, curst and lewd,
And freedom gives their tongues uncanny wit,
And granted silence, thought and solitude
They (*absit omen!*) might make Song of it.

So cage them in, and stand about them thick,
And keep them busy with their daily bread;
And should their eyes seem strange, ah, then be quick
To interrupt them ere the word be said. . . .

For, if their hearts burn with sufficient rage,
With wasted sunsets and frustrated youth,
Some day they'll cry, on some disturbing page,
The savage, sweet, unpalatable truth!

A STONE IN ST. PAUL'S GRAVEYARD

(New York)

Here Lyes the Body of
Iohn Jones the Son of
Iohn Jones Who Departed
This Life December the 13
1768 Aged 4 Years & 4 Months & 2 Days

Here, where enormous shadows creep,
He casts his childish shadow too:
How small he seems, beneath the steep
Great walls; his tender days, so few,
Lovingly numbered, every one—
John Jones, John Jones's little son.

O sunlight on the Lightning's wings!
Yet though our buildings skyward climb
Our heartbreaks are but little things
In the equality of Time.
The sum of life, for all men's stones:
He was John Jones, son of John Jones.

OF HER GLORIOUS MADNESS

The city's mad: through her prodigious veins
What errant, strange, eccentric humours thrill:
Day, when her cataracts of sunlight spill—
Night, golden-panelled with her window panes;
The toss of wind-blown skirts; and who can drill
Forever his fierce heart with checking reins?
Cruel and mad, my statisticians say—
Ah, but she raves in such a gallant way!

Brave madness, built for beauty and the sun—
In such a town who can be sane? Not I.
Of clashing colours all her moods are spun—
A scarlet anger and a golden cry.
This frantic town where madcap mischiefs run
They ask to take the veil, and be a nun!

TO LOUISE

(A Christmas Baby, Now One Year Old)

Undaunted by a world of grief,
You came upon perplexing days,
And cynics doubt their disbelief
To see the sky-stains in your gaze.

Your sudden and inclusive smile
And your emphatic tears, admit
That you must find this life worth while,
So eagerly you clutch at it!

Your face of triumph says, brave mite,
That life is full of love and luck—
Of blankets to kick off at night,
And two soft rose-pink thumbs to suck.

O loveliest of pioneers
Upon this trail of long surprise,
May all the stages of the years
Show such enchantment in your eyes!

By parents' patient buttonings,
And endless safety pins, you'll grow
To ribbons, garters, hooks and things,
Up to the Ultimate Trousseau—

But never, in your dainty prime,
Will you be more adored by me
Than when you see, this Great First Time,
Lit candles on a Christmas Tree!

December, 1919.

THE MUSIC BOX

At six, long ere the wintry dawn,
  There sounded through the silent hall
To where I lay, with blankets drawn
  Above my ears, a plaintive call.

The Urchin, in the eagerness
  Of three years old, could not refrain;
Awake, he straightway yearned to dress
  And frolic with his clockwork train.

I heard him with a sullen shock.
  —His sister, by her usual plan,
Had piped us aft at 3 o'clock—
  I vowed to quench the little man.

I leaned above him, somewhat stern,
  And spoke, I fear, with emphasis—
Ah, how much better, parents learn,
  To seal one's censure with a kiss!

Again the house was dark and still,
  Again I lay in slumber's snare,
When down the hall I heard a trill,
  A tiny, tinkling, tuneful air—

His music box! His best-loved toy,
  His crib companion every night;
And now he turned to it for joy
  While waiting for the lagging light.

How clear, and how absurdly sad
  Those tingling pricks of sound unrolled;
They chirped and quavered, as the lad
  His lonely little heart consoled.

Columbia, the Ocean's Gem—
  (Its only tune) shrilled sweet and faint.
He cranked the chimes, admiring them
  In vigil gay, without complaint.

The treble music piped and stirred,
  The leaping air that was his bliss;
And, as I most contritely heard,
  I thanked the all-unconscious Swiss!

The needled jets of melody
  Rang slowlier and died away—
The Urchin slept; and it was I
  Who lay and waited for the day.

SONGS IN A SHOWER BATH

HOT WATER

Gently, while the drenching dribble
  Courses down my sweltered form,
I am basking like a sybil,
  Lazy, languorous, and warm.
I am unambitious, flaccid,
  Well content to drowse and dream:
How I hate life's bitter acid—
  Leave me here to stew and steam.
Underneath this jet so torrid
  I forget the World's sad wrath:
O, activity is horrid!
  Leave me in my shower bath!

COLD WATER

But when I turn the crank
O Zeus!
A silver ecstasy thrills me!
I caper and slap my chilled thighs,
I plan to make a card index of all my ideas
And feel like an efficiency expert.
I tweak Fate by the nose
And know I could succeed in *anything*.
I throw up my head
And glut myself with icy splatter. . . .
To-day I will really
Begin my Career!

MEDITATION ON SOME BOOKSHELVES SHORTLY TO BE BUILT

Assiduus sis in bibliotheca, quae tibi Paradisi loco est.
ERASMUS to BISHOP FISHER.

Friend carpenter, *in re* those shelves of mine,
It matters little of what wood you build them:
Seek out no oak or walnut; common pine,
Or cypress, will look well when I have filled them.

No doors of glass, or scroll-work done for looks;
No cornices, no carving, and no beading—
The ornaments of bookshelves are the books,
And mine are not for show, but all for reading.

The topmost shelf eight inches, if you please,
To hold my dumpy twelves and my 16mos;
The others measured taller by degrees
For books like Henry Adams and his keen *mots*.

And now, while all my volumes are still boxed
And stand about in dreary packing cases,
I'll think about their pages—clean or foxed—
And plan just how I'll put them in their places.

My "Everymans"—six feet of varied hue—
  Chatto and Windus' pocket R.L.S.'s—
The India-paper Boswell, fat and blue,
  A noble bit of work from Oxford's presses.

The small red Shakespeares—Robby Burns's tunes—
  My Bunyan, my "Urn Burial," my Borrow—
The bright green Lamb (thin paper) made by Newnes—
  (I wish those shelves could be done by tomorrow!)

The tiny Omar from Southampton Row
  Tersely inscribed with two sets of initials,
Which same (the first I gave Her, long ago)
  Brought us at last to City Hall officials.

The Houghton-Mifflin Keats means much to me
  (Bought from John Wanamaker, when a stripling),
And Thomas Mosher's grand facsimile
  Of "Leaves of Grass" (the First)—and here's my Kipling!

"Vergilii Maronis Opera"
  Imprinted 1873 at Leipsic;
My Goldsmith, stained with tea at Thompson's Spa;
  My Apperson on Smoking, when I'm pipe-sick.

My "Bibelots," "World's Classics," and my
"Bohns";
(I'd like to see those books again this minute!)
My Poe, in Baltimore (at Hochschild Kohn's)
I got for 19 cents—the mark is in it.

And does my Conrad go up here? He does.
And my McFee, whose writing is a strong man's.
And old Burnand, put out by Roberts Bros.,
And De la Mare, with the imprint of Longmans.

I must not start upon this theme again;
I will compose my longings unto slumber;
For Harry Smith says he can't tell just when
He'll get that much desiderated lumber.

But when brave Harry comes with wood and
paints,
And in their nest my bairns are safely brooded,
I'll number o'er my literary saints,
And his good name will surely be included!

THE HIGH CHAIR

Grimly the parent matches wit and will:
Now, Weesy, three more spoons! See Tom the cat,
He'd drink it. You want to be big and fat
Like Daddy, don't you? (Careful now, don't spill!)

Yes. Daddy'll dance, and blow smoke through his
nose,
But you must finish first. Come, drink it up—
(*Splash!*) Oh, you *must* keep both hands on the
cup.
All gone? Now for the prunes. . . .
And so it goes.

This is the battlefield that parents know,
Where one small splinter of old Adam's rib
Withstands an entire household offering spoons.
No use to gnash your teeth. For she will go
Radiant to bed, glossy from crown to bib
With milk and cereal and a surf of prunes.

CAUGHT IN THE UNDERTOW

Colin, worshipping some frail,
By self-deprecation sways her:
Calls himself unworthy male,
Hardly even fit to praise her.

But this tactic insincere
In the upshot greatly grieves him
When he finds the lovely dear
Quite implicitly believes him.

SUNDAY NIGHT

Two grave brown eyes, severely bent
  Upon a memorandum book—
A sparkling face, on which are blent
  A hopeful and a pensive look;
A pencil, purse, and book of checks
  With stubs for varying amounts—
Elaine, the shrewdest of her sex,
  Is busy balancing accounts!

Sedately, in the big armchair,
  She, all engrossed, the audit scans—
Her pencil hovers here and there
  The while she calculates and plans;
What's this? A faintly pensive frown
  Upon her forehead gathers now—
Ah, does the butcher—heartless clown—
  Beget that shadow on her brow?

A murrain on the tradesman churl
  Who caused this fair accountant's gloom!
Just then—a baby's cry—my girl
  Arose and swiftly left the room.
Then in her purse by stratagem
  I thrust some bills of small amounts—
She'll think she had forgotten them,
  And smile again at her accounts!

TO HIS BROWN-EYED MISTRESS

WHO RALLIED HIM FOR PRAISING BLUE EYES IN HIS VERSES

If sometimes, in a random phrase
  (For variation in my ditty),
I chance blue eyes, or grey, to praise
  And seem to intimate them pretty—

It is because I do not dare
  With too unmixed reiteration
To sing the browner eyes and hair
  That are my true intoxication.

Know, then, that I consider brown
  For ladies' eyes, the only colour;
And deem all other orbs in town
  (Compared to yours), opaquer, duller.

I pray, perpend, my dearest dear;
  While blue-eyed maids the praise were drinking,
How insubstantial was their cheer—
  It was of yours that I was thinking!

PEACE

What is this Peace
  That statesmen sign?
How I have sought
  To make it mine.

Where groaning cities
  Clang and glow
I hunted, hunted,
  Peace to know.

And still I saw
  Where I passed by
Discarded hearts,—
  Heard children cry.

By willowed waters
  Brimmed with rain
I thought to capture
  Peace again.

I sat me down
  My Peace to hoard,
But Beauty pricked me
  With a sword.

For in the stillness
  Something stirred,
And I was crippled
  For a word.

There is no peace
  A man can find;
The anguish sits
  His heart behind.

The eyes he loves,
  The perfect breast,
Too exquisite
  To give him rest.

This is his curse
  Since brain began.
His penalty
  For being man.

MOUNTED POLICE

Watchful, grave, he sits astride his horse,
  Draped with his rubber poncho, in the rain;
He speaks the pungent lingo of "The Force,"
  And those who try to bluff him, try in vain.

Inured to every mood of fool and crank,
  Shrewdly and sternly all the crowd he cons:
The rain drips down his horse's shining flank,
  A figure nobly fit for sculptor's bronze.

O knight commander of our city stress,
  Little you know how picturesque you are!
We hear you cry to drivers who transgress:
  "*Say, that's a helva place to park your car!*"

SONG, IN DEPRECATION OF PULCHRITUDE

Beauty (so the poets say),
  Thou art joy and solace great;
Long ago, and far away
  Thou art safe to contemplate,

Beauty. But when now and here,
  Visible and close to touch,
All too perilously near,
  Thou tormentest us too much!

In a picture, in a song,
  In a novel's conjured scenes,
Beauty, that's where you belong,
  Where perspective intervenes.

But, my dear, in rosy fact
  Your appeal I have to shirk—
You disturb me, and distract
  My attention from my work!

ON A WHITE MUSLIN DRESS IN A MODISTE'S WINDOW

Demure white frock which I espy,
What slender damosel will buy
  This miracle of dainty dress
  And grace it with her loveliness,
The bliss of every doting eye?

Upon a dummy figure lie
These tender folds, and seem to sigh
  Some softer bosom to possess,
    Demure white frock!

I can't resist. The price is high,
But my cigars I will deny;
  I'll get the thing for you, dear Bess,
  And when you wear it, I'll confess
How utterly entrancing I
    Deem your white frock!

A VALENTINE

To her whose glamour moves and stirs
  And bids me try to do her honour,
Whose peerless beauty made me hers
  The first time I laid eyes upon her—
Whose profile thrilled my boyish dream
  And made a shrine for youthful passion,
Whose magic is the chosen theme
  Her lovers praise, each in his fashion—
Who turns her ever-changing face
  To fit the moods that men bring to her,
And in her heart can find a place
  For all who venturously woo her—
To her who, beautiful and great,
  Deserves a more pretentious ditty—
To her, in love, I dedicate
  This Valentine—to New York City!

TO HIS MISTRESS, DEPLORING THAT HE IS NOT AN ELIZABETHAN GALAXY

Why did not Fate to me bequeath an
Utterance Elizabethan?

It would have been delight to me
If *natus ante* 1603.

My stuff would not be soon forgotten
If I could write like Harry Wotton.

I wish that I could wield the pen
Like William Drummond of Hawthornden.

I would not fear the ticking clock
If I were Browne of Tavistock.

For blithe conceits I would not worry
If I were Raleigh, or the Earl of Surrey

I wish (I hope I am not silly?)
That I could juggle words like Lyly

I envy many a lyric champion,
I. e., viz., e. g., Thomas Campion.

I creak my rhymes up like a derrick,
I ne'er will be a Robin Herrick.

My wits are dull as an old Barlow—
I wish that I were Christopher Marlowe.

In short, I'd like to be Philip Sidney,
Or some one else of that same kidney.

For if I were, my lady's looks
  And all my lyric special pleading
Would be in all the future books,
  And called, at college, *Required Reading*.

THE TWINS

Con was a thorn to brother Pro—
On Pro we often sicked him:
Whatever Pro would claim to know
Old Con would contradict him!

A PRINTER'S MADRIGAL

(Extremely technical)

I'd like to have you meet my wife!
I simply cannot keep from hinting
I've never seen, in all my life,
So fine a specimen of printing.

Her type is not some **bold-face** font,
Set solid. Nay! And I will say out
That no typographer could want
To see a better balanced layout.

A nice proportion of white space
There is for brown eyes to look large in,
And not a feature in her face
Comes anywhere too near the margin.

Locked up with all her sweet display
Her form will never pi. She's like a
Corrected proof marked *stet*, *O. K.*—
And yet she loves me, fatface **Pica!**

She has a fine one-column head,
And like a comma curves each eyebrow—
Her forehead has an extra lead
Which makes her seem a trifle highbrow.

Her nose, *italicized brevier*,
Too lovely to describe by penpoint;
Her mouth is set in pearl: her ear
And chin are comely Caslon ten-point.

Her cheeks (a pink parenthesis)
Make my pulse beat 14-em measure,
And such typography as this
Would make De Vinne scream with pleasure.

And so, of all typefounder chaps
Her father's best, in my opinion;
She is my NONPAREIL (IN CAPS)
And I (in lower case) her minion:

I hope you will not stand aloof
Because my metaphors are shoppy;
Of her devotion I've a proof—
I tell the urchin, *Follow Copy!*

THE POET ON THE HEARTH

When fire is kindled on the dogs,
  But still the stubborn oak delays,
Small embers laid above the logs
  Will draw them into sudden blaze.

Just so the minor poet's part:
  (A greater he need not desire)
The charcoals of his burning heart
  May light some Master into fire!

THE INTRUDER

As I sat, to sift my dreaming
  To the meet and needed word,
Came a merry Interruption
  With insistence to be heard.

Smiling stood a maid beside me,
  Half alluring and half shy;
Soft the white hint of her bosom—
  Escapade was in her eye.

"I must not be so invaded,"
  (In an anger then I cried)—
"Can't you see that I am busy?
  Tempting creature, stay outside!

"Pearly rascal, I am writing:
I am now composing verse—
Fie on antic invitation:
Wanton, vanish—fly—disperse!

"Baggage, in my godlike moment
What have I to do with thee?"
And she laughed as she departed—
"I am Poetry," said she.

TIT FOR TAT

I often pass a gracious tree
Whose name I can't identify,
But still I bow, in courtesy—
It waves a bough, in kind reply.

I do not know your name, O tree
(Are you a hemlock or a pine?)
But why should that embarrass me?
Quite probably you don't know mine.

DIARISTS

They catalogue their minutes: Now, now, now,
Is Actual, amid the fugitive;
Take ink and pen (they say) for that is how
We snare this flying life, and make it live.

So to their little pictures, and they sieve
  Their happinesses: fields turned by the plough,
The afterglow that summer sunsets give,
  The razor concave of a great ship's bow.

O gallant instinct, folly for men's mirth!
  Type cannot burn and sparkle on the page.
No glittering ink can make this written word
  Shine clear enough to speak the noble rage
And instancy of life. All sonnets blurred
  The sudden mood of truth that gave them birth.

CHARLES AND MARY

(December 27, 1834)

Lamb died just before I left town, and Mr. Ryle of the E. India House, one of his extors., notified it to me. . . . He said Miss L. was resigned and composed at the event, but it was from her malady, then in mild type, so that when she saw her brother dead, she observed on his beauty when asleep and apprehended nothing further.—Letter of John Rickman, *24 January, 1835.*

I hear their voices still: the stammering one
Struggling with some absurdity of jest;
Her quiet words that puzzle and protest
Against the latest outrage of his fun.
So wise, so simple—has she never guessed
That through his laughter, love and terror run?
For when her trouble came, and darkness pressed,
He smiled, and fought her madness with a pun.

Through all those years it was his task to keep
Her gentle heart serenely mystified.
If Fate's an artist, this should be his pride—
When, in that Christmas season, he lay dead,
She innocently looked. "I always said
That Charles is really handsome when asleep."

A VALENTINE GAME

(For Two Players)

They have a game, thus played:
He says unto his maid
What are those shining things
So brown, so golden brown?
And she, in doubt, replies
How now, what shining things
So brown?

But then, she coming near,
To see more clear,
He looks again, and cries
(All startled with surprise)
Sweet wretch, they are your eyes,
So brown, so brown!

The climax and the end consist
In kissing, and in being kissed.

TO A CHILD

The greatest poem ever known
Is one all poets have outgrown:
The poetry, innate, untold,
Of being only four years old.

Still young enough to be a part
Of Nature's great impulsive heart,
Born comrade of bird, beast and tree
And unselfconscious as the bee—

And yet with lovely reason skilled
Each day new paradise to build:
Elate explorer of each sense,
Without dismay, without pretence!

In your unstained transparent eyes
There is no conscience, no surprise:
Life's queer conundrums you accept,
Your strange divinity still kept.

Being, that now absorbs you, all
Harmonious, unit, integral,
Will shred into perplexing bits,—
Oh, contradictions of the wits!

And Life, that sets all things in rhyme,
May make you poet, too, in time—
But there were days, O tender elf,
When you were Poetry itself!

CONFESSIONS IN A HASH-HOUSE

I'm through!
Seven years I've worked at this hash counter,
Stooping five hundred times a day
To shout down the dumb-waiter to Pete
(That Polack never pays any attention,
I can't get a thing I ask for)
And spilling a line of cheerful chatter
To my customers.
I should think men would get tired of kidding.

Those guys that are so particular,
Send back their scrambled eggs for another three minutes,
Must have their tomatoes on a side dish
And not on the meat,
Gee, I'll bet when they're home
They take what comes to them
And shut up about it.
And I'll bet that the fresh guys
Who pull the jazz talk day after day

Have mighty little to say at home.
Men are a bunch of fakers:
If I ever get one where I want him
I'll make him behave.
I'll bean him with a sad-iron.

I'm tired of kidding the bunch.
I'm tired of listening to their yap about what they
like
And what they don't like.
Just for a change I'd like to see some one
Come in here and order his lunch and eat it
Without trying to be funny about it.
If all this stooping wasn't so good for the figure
(But, oh, my back, by six P.M.!)
I'da quit long ago.

Well, girls, I'm through.
Next week I'm going to marry a fellow,
And I don't mind telling you, I'm in luck.
He works in a restrunt on Girard Avenue,
So he won't never be home to meals.

NURSERY RHYMES FOR THE TENDER-HEARTED

I

Scuttle, scuttle, little roach—
How you run when I approach:
Up above the pantry shelf,
Hastening to secrete yourself.

Most adventurous of vermin,
How I wish I could determine
How you spend your hours of ease,
Perhaps reclining on the cheese.

Cook has gone, and all is dark—
Then the kitchen is your park:
In the garbage heap that she leaves
Do you browse among the tea leaves?

How delightful to suspect
All the places you have trekked:
Does your long antenna whisk its
Gentle tip across the biscuits?

Do you linger, little soul,
Drowsing in our sugar bowl?

Or, abandonment most utter,
Shake a shimmy on the butter?

Do you chant your simple tunes
Swimming in the baby's prunes?
Then, when dawn comes, do you slink
Homeward to the kitchen sink?

Timid roach, why be so shy?
We are brothers, thou and I.
In the midnight, like yourself,
I explore the pantry shelf!

II

Rockabye, insect, lie low in thy den,
Father's a cockroach, mother's a hen.
And Betty, the maid, doesn't clean up the sink,
So you shall have plenty to eat and to drink.

Hushabye, insect, behind the mince pies:
If the cook sees you her anger will rise;
She'll scatter poison, as bitter as gall,
Death to poor cockroach, hen, baby and all.

III

There was a gay henroach, and what do you think,
She lived in a cranny behind the old sink—
Eggshells and grease were the chief of her diet;
She went for a stroll when the kitchen was quiet.

She walked in the pantry and sampled the bread,
But when she came back her old husband was dead:
Long had he lived, for his legs they were fast,
But the kitchen maid caught him and squashed him at last.

IV

I knew a black beetle, who lived down a drain,
And friendly he was though his manners were plain;
When I took a bath he would come up the pipe,
And together we'd wash and together we'd wipe.

Though mother would sometimes protest with a sneer
That my choice of a tub-mate was wanton and queer,
A nicer companion I never have seen:
He bathed every night, so he must have been clean.

Whenever he heard the tap splash in the tub
He'd dash up the drain-pipe and wait for a scrub,
And often, so fond of ablution was he,
I'd find him there floating and waiting for me.

But nurse has done something that seems a great
shame:
She saw him there, waiting, prepared for a game:
She turned on the hot and she scalded him sore
And he'll never come bathing with me any more.

THE SUPERMAN

The man I give toast to
And praise in this sonnet
Has never played host to
A bee in his bonnet.
Remarkably moderate,
Thoroughly sane,
Indeed odd and odder it
Seems to my brain
So few are inclined to
Give heed to his tone,
But still have a mind to
Fool views of their own.
The wisdom of Sinai is his by the shelf . . .
Of course you divine I—allude to Myself.

THE URBAN POET

(Requested to supply a spring poem, while his wife, who understands these matters, is away from home.)

When reeks the fœtid *symplocarp*
(Or cabbage, frankly known as *skunk*)
And when the frogs, with pipe and harp,
Begin to whistle and to plunk,

I think of yellow marigolds
(They must be yellow, by the name)
And of the bloodroot that unfolds
As bright (presumably?) as flame.

Hepaticas, so frail and ——,
And —— —— —— anemones
That on this —— —— covered bank
Are trembling in the gentle breeze.

The saxifrage, clear —— in hue
(Oh, is it yellow, red or pink?)
The violet's undoubted blue,
The Dutchman's Breeches (mauve, I think?)

The lucid willow by the stream
With —— —— catkins of soft fur;
The mountain laurel's —— gleam,
All these are lovely, I aver.

Dear burdock, blossom of my heart,
  Upon your petals glad I look;
(I do not know these things apart,
  And got their names out of a book.*)

Oh, flowery friends of field and wood,
  What pleasure your existence gives. . . .
And honestly, I wish I could
  Supply the proper adjectives!

MUSINGS ON A COOL RETREAT

I know a little hidden pool
  Where happy bathers oft repair;
Secluded, clear and deep and cool,
  Men find right brave refreshment there,
And swiftly doffing shirts and panties
They revel blissful—*rari nantes.*

Remote from scenes of toil and teen
  All heat and grievance they expunge;
Enjoying in that shimmering green
  The swift shock of a silver plunge,
And crying "*O deorum quicquid*
We thank thee for this pool: *some* liquid!"

*Familiar Features of the Roadside, by F. Schuyler Mathews.

Sharp glory of that dive, the first—
And thrill (but how can it be told?)
When bodies, slowly falling, burst
Into the all-encircling cold,
Then splash, or float among the ripple
As passive as a participle.

How far away, you will agree,
Must lie that cool and placid grot—
Amid the Catskill greenery?
Some distant Adirondack spot?
Yet, if you ask where is the place meant—
The Woolworth Building, in the basement!

THE ORPHAN POEM

A poet said, "I'll write a song that every one will sing,
A verse with just the human note that carries fast and far—
I shall be known forever as the man who wrote that thing;
The papers will reprint it from here to Zanzibar!"

He wrote the piece, "Those Old Blue Jeans." It made a ready hit,
And in the mazes of the press the song began to range;

But someone's hasty scissors snipped the author's
name from it,
And everywhere he saw it, it was credited
"Exchange."

Anthologies, the rural press and patent almanacs
Reprinted it; and humorists revamped it for
their turns;
He found it in his clippings, which were piling up
in stacks,
Attributed to Riley, Eugene Field and Robby
Burns.

He tried to catch the orphan: he sought in his
distress
To salt its tail and make the poem wear the
name it ought;
The derelict kept wandering on the ocean of the
press—
If he nailed it down in Portland, it popped up
in Terre Haute!

He wrote to all the editors of all the magazines
Until they wished the wretched man were laid
beneath the ferns;
And when he called they'd lock the door and say
"Here's Old Blue Jeans:
The idiot who thinks he wrote that piece by
Robby Burns!"

The moral of the ditty is just this, my poet friends—
When you write those homely poems, put your name on at both ends!

A CHANTEY OF DEPARTED SPIRITS

The earth is grown puny and pallid,
The earth is grown gouty and grey,
For whisky no longer is valid
And wine has been voted away—
As for beer, we no longer will swill it
In riotous rollicking spree;
The little hot dogs in the skillet
Will have to be swallowed with tea.

O ales that were creamy like lather!
O beers that were foamy like suds!
O fizz that I loved like a father!
O fie on the drinks that are duds!
I sat by the doors that were slatted
And the stuff had a surf like the sea—
No vintage was anywhere vatted
Too strong for ventripotent me!

I wallowed in waves that were tidal,
But yet I was never unmoored;
And after the twentieth seidel
My syllables still were assured.
I never was forced to cut cable
And drift upon perilous shores,
To get home I was perfectly able,
Erect, or at least on all fours.

Although I was often some swiller,
I never was fuddled or blowzed;
My hand was still firm on the tiller,
No matter how deep I caroused;
But now they have put an embargo
On jazz-juice that tingles the spine,
We can't even cozen a cargo
Of harmless old gooseberry wine!

But no legislation can daunt us:
The drinks that we knew never die:
Their spirits will come back to haunt us
And whimper and hover near by.
The spookists insist that communion
Exists with the souls that we lose—
And so we may count on reunion
With all that's immortal of Booze.

WHEN SHAKESPEARE LAUGHED

When Shakespeare laughed, the fun began!
Even the tavern barmaids ran
To choke in secret, and unbent
A lace, to ease their merriment.
The *Mermaid* rocked to hear the man.

Then Ben his aching girth would span,
And roar above his pasty pan,
"Avast there, Will, for I am spent!"
When Shakespeare laughed.

I' faith, let him be grave who can
When Falstaff, Puck and Caliban
In one explosive jest are blent.
The boatmen on the river lent
An ear to hear the mirthful clan
When Shakespeare laughed.

TO LUATH

(Robert Burns's Dog)

"Darling Jean" was Jean Armour, a "comely country lass," whom Burns met at a penny wedding at Mauchline. They chanced to be dancing in the same quadrille when the poet's dog sprang to his master and almost upset some of the dancers. Burns remarked that he wished he could get any of the lasses to like him as well as his dog did.

Some days afterward, Jean, seeing him pass as she was bleaching clothes on the village green, called to him and asked him if he had yet got any of the lasses to like him as well as his dog did.

That was the beginning of an acquaintance that coloured all Burns's life.

NATHAN HASKELL DOLE.

Well, Luath, man, when you came prancing
All glee to see your Robin dancing,
His partner's muslin gown mischancing
  You leaped for joy!
And little guessed what sweet romancing
  You caused, my boy!

With happy bark, that moment jolly,
You frisked and frolicked, faithful collie;
His other dog, old melancholy,
  Was put to flight—
But what a tale of grief and folly
  You wagged that night!

Ah, Luath, tyke, your bonny master
Whose lyric pulse beat ever faster
Each time he saw a lass and passed her
  His breast went bang!
In many a woful heart's disaster
  He felt the pang!

Poor Robin's heart, forever burning,
Forever roving, ranting, yearning,
From you that heart might have been learning
  To be less fickle!
Might have been spared so many a turning
  And grievous prickle!

Your collie heart held but one notion—
When Robbie jigged in sprightly motion
You ran to show your own devotion
  And gambolled too,
And so that tempest on love's ocean
  Was due to you!

Well, it is ower late for preaching
And hearts are aye too hot for teaching!
When Robin with his eye beseeching
  By greenside came,
Jeanie—poor lass—forgot her bleaching
  And yours the blame!

BALLADE OF AN AMBROSIAL EVENING

I know a pub where I can chow at dusk
  On lentil soup, grilled kidneys and white wine;
Take coffee in the garden, with a rusk,
  And smoke black leaf tobacco while I dine—
  And drink liqueurs until my seasoned spine
    Begins to tingle and my brain to whirr:
  Then bring a candle, landlord, just at nine,
    And have the sheets perfumed with lavender!

Pour me a claret (Medoc, sweet as musk!)
  Carve me a juicy cut along the chine,
Then watch me ply a not unwilling tusk
  And quaff the western sun down his decline.
  Perhaps some olives, seasoned well in brine,
    Or pot of shandygaff, if you prefer;
  But, landlord, to complete the fair design,
    Pray have the sheets perfumed with lavender!

No heavy vintage: nothing strong or brusque—
  The smooth and mellow essence of the vine—
Perhaps some green corn, roasted in the husk,
  And omelette singed with brandy—O benign!

Allegro ma non troppo is my line:
The graceful mean where all the arts concur
To make one long ambrosial evening mine,
And then—O sheets perfumed with lavender!

ENVOY

O best of landlords! Let your light so shine
That many another thirsty wanderer
May (after dinner) all his cares resign
And find your sheets perfumed with lavender!

THOUGHTS ON REACHING LAND

I had a friend whose path was pain—
Oppressed by all the cares of earth
Life gave him little chance to drain
His secret cisterns of rich mirth.

His work was hasty, harassed, vexed:
His dreams were laid aside, perforce,
Until—in this world, or the next. . . .
(His trade? Newspaper man, of course!)

What funded wealth of tenderness,
What ingots of the heart and mind
He must uneasily repress
Beneath the rasping daily grind.

But now and then, and with my aid,
For fear his soul be wholly lost,
His devoir to the grape he paid
To call soul back, at any cost!

Then, liberate from discipline,
Undrugged by caution and control,
Through all his veins came flooding in
The virtued passion of his soul!

His spirit bared, and felt no shame:
With holy light his eyes would shine—
See Truth her acolyte reclaim
After the second glass of wine!

The self that life had trodden hard
Aspired, was generous and free:
The glowing heart that care had charred
Grew flame, as it was meant to be.

A pox upon the canting lot
Who call the glass the Devil's shape—
A greater pox where'er some sot
Defiles the honour of the grape.

Then look with reverence on wine
That kindles human brains uncouth—
There must be something part divine
In aught that brings us nearer Truth!

So—continently skull your fumes
(Here let our little sermon end)
And bless this X-ray that illumes
The secret bosom of your friend!

A SYMPOSIUM

There was a Russian novelist
Whose name was Solugubrious,
The reading circles took him up,
(They'd heard he was salubrious.)

The women's club of Cripple Creek
Soon held a kind of seminar
To learn just what his message was—
You know what bookworms women are.

The tea went round. After five cups
(You should have seen them bury tea)
Dear Mrs. Brown said what she liked
Was the great man's *sincerity*.

Sweet Mrs. Jones (how free she was
From all besetting vanity)
Declared that she loved even more
His broad and deep *humanity*.

Good Mrs. Smith, though she disclaimed
All thought of being critical,
Protested that she found his work
A wee bit *analytical.*

But Mrs. Black, the President,
Of wisdom found the pinnacle:
She said, "Dear me, I always think
Those Russians are so *cynical.*"

Well, poor old Solugubrious,
It's true that they had heard of him;
But neither Brown, Jones, Smith, nor Black
Had ever read a word of him!

A BASEMENT LOVE SONG

O love of mine, some months ago
(Emotion my speech hinders)
Our passion lost its ruddy glow
And flickered out in cinders.

And yet, old dear, that winter through
(Before our paths divided)
Did any other care for you
As ardently as I did?

But now resumes love's festival,
  Rekindling ancient embers—
And all the former fever shall
  Revivify your members.

Again I'll woo you, and will deem
  You worthy of your wages,
And, as a gauge of my esteem,
  Keep steam up in your gauges.

When bitter blasts howl wintrily
  I'll hug you close. My love'll
Be large with chestnut, egg and pea,
  And buss you with a shovel!

QUICKENING

Such little puny things are words in rhyme:
  Poor feeble loops and strokes as frail as hairs;
You see them printed here, and mark their chime,
  And turn to your more durable affairs.
  Yet on such petty tools the poet dares
To run his race with mortar, bricks and lime,
  And draws his frail stick to the point, and stares
To aim his arrow at the heart of Time.

Intangible, yet pressing, hemming in,
  This measured emptiness engulfs us all,
And yet he points his paper javelin
  And sees it eddy, waver, turn, and fall,
And feels, between delight and trouble torn,
The stirring of a sonnet still unborn.

AT A WINDOW SILL

To write a sonnet needs a quiet mind. . . .
I paused and pondered, tried again. *To write. . . .*
Raising the sash, I breathed the winter night:
Papers and small hot room were left behind.
Against the gusty purple, ribbed and spined
With golden slots and vertebræ of light
Men's cages loomed. Down sliding from a height
An elevator winked as it declined.

Coward! There is no quiet in the brain—
If pity burns it not, then beauty will:
Tinder it is for every blowing spark.
Uncertain whether this is bliss or pain
The unresting mind will gaze across the sill
From high apartment windows, in the dark.

THE RIVER OF LIGHT

I. BROADWAY, 103RD TO 96TH

Lights foam and bubble down the gentle grade:
Bright shine chop sueys and rôtisseries;
In pink translucence glowingly displayed
See camisole and stocking and chemise.
Delicatessen windows full of cheese—
Above, the chimes of church-bells toll and fade—
And then, from off some distant Palisade
That gluey savour on the Jersey breeze!

The burning bulbs, in green and white and red,
Spell out a *Change of Program Sun., Wed., Fri.*,
A clicking taxi spins with ruby spark.
There is a sense of poising near the head
Of some great flume of brightness, flowing by
To pour in gathering torrent through the dark.

II. BELOW 96TH

The current quickens, and in golden flow
Hurries its flotsam downward through the night—
Here are the rapids where the undertow
Whirls endless motors in a gleaming flight.
From blazing tributaries, left and right,
Influent streams of blue and amber grow.
Columbus Circle eddies: all below
Is pouring flame, a gorge of broken light.

See how the burning river boils in spate,
Channelled by cliffs of insane jewellery,
Painting a rosy roof on cloudy air—
And just about ten minutes after eight,
Tossing a surf of colour to the sky
It bursts in cataracts upon Times Square!

IN AN AUCTION ROOM

(*Letter of John Keats to Fanny Brawne, Anderson Galleries, March 15, 1920.*)

(To Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach)

How about this lot? said the auctioneer;
One hundred, may I say, just for a start?
Between the plum-red curtains, drawn apart,
A written sheet was held. . . . And strange to hear
(Dealer, would I were steadfast as thou art)
The cold quick bids. (*Against you in the rear!*)
The crimson salon, in a glow more clear
Burned bloodlike purple as the poet's heart.

Song that outgrew the singer! Bitter Love
That broke the proud hot heart it held in thrall—
Poor script, where still those tragic passions move—
Eight hundred bid: fair warning: the last call:
The soul of Adonais, like a star. . . .
Sold for eight hundred dollars—Doctor R.!

EPITAPH FOR A POET WHO WROTE NO POETRY

"It is said that a poet has died young in the breast of the most stolid."

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

What was the service of this poet? He
Who blinked the blinding dazzle-rays that run
Where life profiles its edges to the sun,
And still suspected much he could not see.
Clay-stopped, yet in his taciturnity
There lay the vein of glory, known to none;
And moods of secret smiling, only won
When peace and passion, time and sense, agree.

Fighting the world he loved for chance to brood,
Ignorant when to embrace, when to avoid
His loves that held him in their vital clutch—
This was his service, his beatitude;
This was the inward trouble he enjoyed
Who knew so little, and who felt so much.

TO A VAUDEVILLE TERRIER SEEN ON A LEASH, IN THE PARK

Three times a day—at two, at seven, at nine—
O terrier, you play your little part:
Absurd in coat and skirt you push a cart,
With inner anguish walk a tight-rope line.

Up there, before the hot and dazzling shine
You must be rigid servant of your art,
Nor watch those fluffy cats—your doggish heart
Might leap and then betray you with a whine!

But sometimes, when you've faithfully rehearsed,
Your trainer takes you walking in the park,
Straining to sniff the grass, to chase a frog.
The leash is slipped, and then your joy will burst—
Adorable it is to run and bark,
To be—alas, how seldom—just a dog!

TO A BURLESQUE SOUBRETTE

Upstage the great high-shafted beefy choir
  Squawked in 2000 watts of orange glare—
  You came, and impudent and deuce-may-care
Danced where the gutter flamed with footlight fire.

Flung from the roof, spots red and yellow burned
  And followed you. The blatant brassy clang
  Of instruments drowned out the words you sang,
But goldenly you capered, twirled and turned.

Boyish and slender, child-limbed, quick and proud,
  A sprite of irresistible disdain,
  Fair as a jonquil in an April rain,
You seemed too sweet an imp for that dull
    crowd. . . .

And then, behind the scenes, I heard you say,
"*O Gawd, I got a hellish cold to-day!*"

SONNET OF A GEOMETER

THE CIRCLE

Few things are perfect: we bear Eden's scar;
Yet faulty man was godlike in design
That day when first, with stick and length of twine,
He drew me on the sand. Then what could mar
His joy in that obedient mystic line;
And then, computing with a zeal divine,
He called π 3-point-14159
And knew my lovely circuit $2\ \pi\ r$!

A circle is a happy thing to be—
Think how the joyful perpendicular
Erected at the kiss of tangency
Must meet my central point, my avatar!
They talk of 14 points: yet only 3
Determine every circle: Q. E. D.

SONNETS IN TIME OF TRIAL

(See *Much Ado About Nothing*, Act I, Scene 5, lines 35–36.)

I

Queer! there was no premonitory twitch,
No twangling of my nerves, to advertise
All you would mean to me: contrariwise,
Full-blown your passion seized me: passion which
Made our relation so supremely rich
In yearning, wild remorses, and surprise.
And yet I uttered hardly any cries
When Pain danced tiptoe in her pallid niche.

O bitter my immedicable woe—
And must I lose you? Ah, I could not tell!
Chimerical seemed life and love and youth.
I never knew that I could suffer so
Until I ate that chocolate caramel
And throbbed with you, O sorely stricken tooth!

II

I felt that crumbling, teetering thrill again:
Life was a nausea, earth a black disgrace;
The sunlight was offensive to my face;
Man, made of mud, and conduited for pain.

I longed to probe through tissue, nerve and vein
And with some thin, sharp instrument to chase
This lurking fiend of torment from his place
And free the devil tugging at his chain.

A shaking, shuddering pang, and I was shent;
It seemed to split my skull, without a warning;
I thought: I hope I'll soon be dead, by Jove!
I took my hat and stick, and out I went.
The druggist, as I bought some oil of clove,
Said, "What a jolly, sunny Sunday morning!"

TO AN OLD FRIEND

(For Lloyd Williams)

I like to dream of some established spot
Where you and I, old friend, an evening through
Under tobacco's fog, streaked grey and blue,
Might reconsider laughters unforgot.
Beside a hearth-glow, golden-clear and hot,
I'd hear you tell the oddities men do.
The clock would tick, and we would sit, we two—
Life holds such meetings for us, does it not?

Happy are men when they have learned to prize
The sure unvarnished virtue of their friends,
The unchanged kindness of a well-known face:

On old fidelities our world depends,
And runs a simple course in honest wise,
Not a mere taxicab shot wild through space!

THOUGHTS WHILE PACKING A TRUNK

The sonnet is a trunk, and you must pack
  With care, to ship frail baggage far away;
  The octet is the trunk; sestet, the tray;
Tight, but not overloaded, is the knack.
First, at the bottom, heavy thoughts you stack,
  And in the chinks your adjectives you lay—
  Your phrases, folded neatly as you may,
Stowing a syllable in every crack.

Then, in the tray, your daintier stuff is hid:
  The tender quatrain where your moral sings—
Be careful, though, lest as you close the lid
  You crush and crumple all these fragile things.
Your couplet snaps the hasps and turns the key—
Ship to The Editor, marked C. O. D.

THE TWO-MAN SAW

The rocking, ringing steel sings to and fro,
A steady buzz, a whang and rasp and hiss;
The sawdust spurts and makes twin piles below;
Green wood is tough.
The art is chiefly this:
Don't bear too hard, but leave it to the saw,
(Sam holds the other end, and knows the knack);
Pull firmly, but still lightly, on the draw,
But do not push. Your partner takes it back.

Then, when your rhythm's easy, going well,
And back-arm muscles twinge a bit, mayhap,
Swayed in a kind of dogged swoon, you'll smell
That lusty savour of hot sun on sap.
"Well, Sam, your saw, she swings a wicked tooth." . . .
The trunk is through. Sam grins. "You said the truth!"

A SONNET ON OYSTERS

(Dedicated to Grif Alexander, in honour of a barrel that came from Green Holly Creek, Patuxent River, Maryland.)

To tell the truth, I really never knew
What oysters were, until, one night this week,
A barrel came up from Green Holly Creek
And Grif set up a supper for the crew.

First, on the shell, most glorious to view,
Their little sacks, distent and soft and sleek,
Dribbled with acid lemon-juice, and eke
Bill's home-made ketchup. . . . And then came the
stew!

A stew, I say, since rhyme must needs be sung,
Though, to be factual, the 'valves were panned—
And then, the Colonel's gorgeous bowl of punch.
O zesty broth, serene upon the tongue,
And ginger cookies, baked by Jim's wife's hand,
The night Grif broached that barrel for the bunch!

HOSTAGES

"*He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune.*"
BACON.

Aye, Fortune, thou hast hostage of my best!
I, that was once so heedless of thy frown,
Have armed thee cap-à-pie to strike me down,
Have given thee blades to hold against my breast.
My virtue, that was once all self-possessed,
Is parcelled out in little hands, and brown
Bright eyes, and in a sleeping baby's gown:
To threaten these will put me to the test.

Sure, since there are these pitiful poor chinks
Upon the makeshift armour of my heart,
For thee no honour lies in such a fight!
And thou wouldst shame to vanquish one, methinks,
Who came awake with such a painful start
To hear the coughing of a child at night.

ONLY A MATTER OF TIME

Down-slipping Time, sweet, swift, and shallow stream,
Here, like a boulder, lies this afternoon
Across your eager flow. So you shall stay,
Deepened and dammed, to let me breathe and be.
Your troubled fluency, your running gleam
Shall pause, and circle idly, still and clear:
The while I lie and search your glassy pool
Where, gently coiling in their lazy round,
Unseparable minutes drift and swim,
Eddy and rise and brim. And I will see
How many crystal bubbles of slack Time
The mind can hold and cherish in one *Now!*

Now, for one conscious vacancy of sense,
The stream is gathered in a deepening pond,
Not a mere moving mirror. Through the sharp
Correct reflection of the standing scene

The mind can dip, and cleanse itself with rest,
And see, slow spinning in the lucid gold,
Your liquid motes, imperishable Time.

It cannot be. The runnel slips away:
The clear smooth downward sluice begins again,
More brightly slanting for that trembling pause,
Leaving the sense its conscious vague unease
As when a sonnet flashes on the mind,
Trembles and burns an instant, and is gone.

AT THE MERMAID CAFETERIA

Truth is enough for prose:
Calmly it goes
To tell just what it knows.

For verse, skill will suffice—
Delicate, nice
Casting of verbal dice.

Poetry, men attain
By subtler pain
More flagrant in the brain—

An honesty unfeigned,
A heart unchained,
A madness well restrained.

KEATS

(1821–1921)

When sometimes, on a moony night, I've passed
A street-lamp, seen my doubled shadow flee,
I've noticed how much darker, clearer cast,
The full moon poured her silhouette of me.

Just so of spirits. Beauty's silver light
Limns with a ray more pure, and tenderer too:
Men's clumsy gestures, to unearthly sight,
Surpass the shapes they show by human view.

On this brave world, where few such meteors fell,
Her youngest son, to save us, Beauty flung.
He suffered and descended into hell—
And comforts yet the ardent and the young.

Drunken of moonlight, dazed by draughts of sky,
Dizzy with stars, his mortal fever ran:
His utterance a moon-enchanted cry
Not free from folly—for he too was man.

And now and here, a hundred years away,
Where topless towers shadow golden streets,
The young men sit, nooked in a cheap café,
Perfectly happy . . . talking about Keats.

PRELIMINARY INSTRUCTIONS FOR A FUNERAL SERVICE: BEING A POEM IN FOUR STANZAS

Say this poor fool misfeatured all his days,
And could not mend his ways;
And say he trod
Most heavily upon the corns of God.

But also say that in his clabbered brain
There was the essential pain—
The idiot's vow
To tell his troubled Truth, no matter how.

Unhappy fool, you say, with pitiful air:
Who was he, then, and where?
Ah, you divine
He lives in your heart, as he lives in mine.

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

. . . Browning told a good story about himself and a Chinese ambassador in London who was one of the best poets in the Empire. Browning asked him what sort of poems he had chiefly written. He answered: "My poems are mostly enigmatical." "Then," said Browning, "we are brothers."

Diary of JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS.

Dedicated To
An Anglo-American Mandarin
In Whose Heart Are Many
Celestial Inscriptions
LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

THE PALIMPSEST

There is, in each man's heart,
Chinese writing—
A secret script, a cryptic language:
The strange ideographs of the spirit,
Scribbled over or half erased
By the swift stenography of daily life.

No man can easily decipher this cordiscript,
This blurred text corrupted by fears and follies;
But now and then,
Reading his own heart
(So little studied, such fine reading matter!)
He sees fragments of rubric shine through—
Old words of truth and trouble
Illuminated, red and gold.
The study of this hidden language
Is what I call
Translating from the Chinese.

THE OLD MANDARIN

INSCRIPTION FOR A BUTTERFLY'S WING

THERE are two Languages:
One is of Great Mandarins and Important Affairs,
It is civil, precise, and meaningless.
The other,
The Speech of the Spirit,
So rarely spoken, so dimly understood,
Is haltingly whispered
By lonely men.
In the first I am glib,
In the latter I stammer;
But I know which will serve me
In the Foreign Land.

A TIME OF CRISIS

On a thin blue morning
Of the Month of Officials
Came Noh Kale, the income tax collector.
I laid down my roll of Confucius
And said, "Friend,

My treasure is at your disposal;
Let us audit it together—
Thirteen unfinished poems,
A letter from an editor
Saying that a check will be here shortly;
My ivory chopsticks,
And this view, from my tea house,
Of the girls bathing on the other side of the river."
But still the obstinate agent
Persisted peevishly
And with the reiteration of a primitive mind cried loudly:
"Quarterly instalment still due,
1700 taels."

INSCRIPTION FOR A MAN-HOLE IN BROOKLYN

Sometimes,
In spinning over the leaves of a book,
The eye catches a glamorous phrase
That a methodical search through the volume
Fails to rediscover.
Even so, every day,
There are moments of shining astonishment
That my sober retrospection
Can never define.

"THE SUN'S OVER THE FOREYARD"

When I was a passenger in the barque *Windrush*
I became aware of a pleasant sea custom.
Along toward noon
The captain's boy used to come politely to me
And whisper
"The captain's compliments, and the sun's over the foreyard."
And presently I learned that this meant
Come aft to the poop
And have a drink.
For mariners, men of sound self-control,
Never touch the bottle
Until the sun reaches the yards.

Now that I myself am a seaman
I always ship in square sail,
Never in steam.
In a steamer
The yards are so much higher.

THE OLD MANDARIN ON HIS TRAVELS

When I visited America
I saw two things that struck me as extraordinary:
People packed in the subway
Rocking uneasily on their hams
Endlessly studying the newspapers;
And people packed in the movies
Endlessly staring at the films.
I said to myself
If the American people ever develop Minds
There are two great industries
That will crash.

AN AMERICAN MYSTIC

But you do not understand the subway,
Said an American mystic
Sitting next me at the Rotary Club.
It is a travelling hermitage,
A flying monastery,
A nunnery that moves at fifty miles an hour.
Into its roaring wagons
Thoughtful men and women descend with joy:
They know that there,
The only place in the whole city,
They can meditate undisturbed.

HE LIKES TO GIVE BOTH SIDES OF THE MATTER

And as for the newspapers
(Said another)
You forget that they are the last friend
Many a poor devil has.
Go down to Battery Park
And see the chaps lying on the grass.
Newspapers are their blankets,
Their pillows, their sunshades;
Newspapers their Bibles.
After everything else has gone
A poor bum will cling to his newspaper
As his last link with life.

HE PASSES ON THE GOOD WORD

The Americans, I said,
Are the kindest people in the world,
The most excitable,
The most juvenile.
The men are unaware of philosophy,
The women are unaware they are unaware of philosophy,
But the young girls . . .

And while I was talking
I heard with annoyance
My grand-nephew whispering,
"I must visit America.
I never heard the old statesman so eloquent."

THE OLD MANDARIN GRIEVES

When I was in New York
I studied the faces of the people reading newspapers
In the subway,
And I saw that the papers most read
Were sensational, sordid, salacious.
And in my mind I composed a little message
To the editors of those papers.
"Your readers needed plain, nourishing truth"
(I said)
"And you gave them this scented compost,
Spiced and sugared with vanilla and civet.
They asked for bread
And you gave them
A chocolate éclair."

VERY FEW REMEMBER

As I went down from Trenton
By a strip of canal sword-blade blue in the dusk,
I suddenly remembered

That this was the way to Camp Dix
And I remembered
Troop trains travelling in the night.

A LETTER TO HIS FRIEND MU KOW

The Americans are wrongly supposed to be
Deficient in delicate sentiment.
For when I was in New York
I went to the Polo Grounds
To see what they call the World's Series.
One has to watch baseball every instant,
Or you miss something.
For while I was foolishly admiring
The gold frontier of sunlight receding on the turf
There was a loud cry,
A whirl of dust and limbs,
And I feared some tragic accident.
But when I asked what was amiss
The man next me, with tears in his eyes,
Said that one of the players
Had stolen home.
And I thought to myself
How charmingly touching:
Here, amid all the uproar and excitement,
This fine fellow could not resist the call of his loved ones

And sacrificed his enjoyment just to greet his wife
and bairns.
There can be no question about it,
For the next morning I read an account of the
game
Written by Irvin Cobb, one of their Great Man-
darins,
And he wrote:
"McNally, afflicted with acute nostalgia,
Stole home."

HE COMFORTS HIMSELF

When I visited America
(It is the tedious Old Mandarin speaking)
I was eager to visit the birthplaces
Of Emily Dickinson and Louise Imogen Guiney,
And I found that this people
Had so neglected two of their greatest poets
That they hardly even knew their names.
But I was not peevish nor distraught:
I said to myself
Humanity is everywhere alike—
I myself am but little known in China.

A MOMENT OF MEDITATION

I was told that America was a free country,
But I found many of its substantial citizens
Terrorized by the advertisements
Into believing it was immoral
To wear a straw hat
Later than September 15th.
Wise men know
There is no such thing as a free country—
There never will be.

LITTLE MINDS EVERYWHERE THE SAME

When I walked in America
In my ample robes of a philosopher
Little dogs barked at me
And rude street-boys
Called me Lane Bryant,
Which is, apparently,
The name of an American mandarin.
Even so, when Prominent Americans
Visiting China
Go hurrying about in their tubular trousers
Little dogs bark with anguish.

Thus do petty minds in all lands
Confronted by the unusual
Show their distress.

AN ENIGMA IN THE WOODPILE

An American friend of mine,
A Man in a newspaper office,
Is very wealthy.
He tells me he has an income
Of 10,000 interruptions a year.

HIS EXPERIENCE WITH THE NEWSPAPERS

When the ship came up the harbour
The New York reporters
Hastened to assail me with questions.
For some curious reason
They were eager for my views
On the Fourth Dimension,
Which was then
(So I heard afterward)
A subject of violent discussion
In the Sunday Magazine Sections.
Rather pleased by their interest in such matters,
I said, in all good faith,

The Fourth Dimension is Supra-Spatial:
It bears the same relation to Space
That Space does to Flatness.
It may be said to be Continuity,
Or, speaking poetically,
It is the Shadow
That Time casts on Eternity.

But the high-spirited City Editors,
Finding these modest thoughts of mine
Insufficiently nimble,
Invented others.
They came out that afternoon with large headlines:
AGED MANDARIN SAYS SHORT SKIRTS
MAKE HIM FEEL YOUNG AGAIN.

ERIT ILLE MIHI SEMPER DEUS

I see a lawn
Strewn here and there with little knobs of bone
And chewed billets,
And I feel justified in saying
Somewhere hereabouts
Is a dog.

I see a world
Strewn here and there

With delightful evidences of law—
Geometrical cobwebs, dark blue thunderheads,
The lid of the tea kettle gently chinkling,
Hailstones round and white as camphor-balls—
I say, it looks as though there were a god.

Even if this god is only the binomial theorem,
He is no less a god.

THE HUBBUB OF THE UNIVERSE

Man makes a great fuss
About this planet
Which is only a ball-bearing
In the hub of the universe.
It reminds me
Of the staff of a humorous weekly
Sitting in grave conference
On a two-line joke.

A PATTERN IN THE MUD

Sometimes, in the slime of a city street,
You will see a clear and lovely pattern
Of little loops and triangles
Imprinted by the tire
Of a motor truck.

Such was the life of No Sho,
The young and tender poet.
The city crushed him,
But he left his runes
In the grime.

THE CIGARETTE STUB

Tossed aside in the uproar
No Sho was quenched;
But in his verses
You will hear a satirical whisper
Like the hiss of a cigarette stub
Cast into a sink.

TRAFFIC

Yes, the traffic problem is terrible.
I find it so in my mind, too.
Skipping from the swift shining limousine of an
Emotion,
I am spattered by the broad tires of a thundering
Platitude;
Almost nipped by a clangorous ambulance bearing
a swooning Certainty
I barely escape the rumbling trolley of Doubt.

And ever and again,
While my timid soul stands dubiously alert,
The Fire Chief goes chiming up my medulla
In his little red racer.

VOICES IN THE DARK

There are echoes and shoutings in the dark of the mind
As menacing, reiterative, calamitous-sounding,
As Extras indistinguishably bawled
In uptown streets at night.

And then the next morning
You learn they meant nothing.

A HUMAN INSTINCT

Youth is conservative,
Youth is the Tory,
Youth is the quencher of bright conflagration!
For whenever I light a match to kindle my pipe of opium
The young Mandarin and those quaint damsels his sisters
Competitively cry
O Sire, O Father, O Serene Progenitor,
May I blow it out?

THE BULB

My mind is like an electric bulb
With a broken filament.
The tremulous fine threads of thought
Waver and waver and waver
And when they meet
There is a little fizzing flash,
And my soul is filled
With a sudden delicate green-blue light.

SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN

I was afraid the parson
Would go to law
About that $490 I owed him.
But I bilked him.
I offered to pay it in seventy instalments
Of seven dollars each,
And he didn't dare
Take the money.

POINT OF VIEW

When Abraham Lincoln was murdered
The thing that interested Matthew Arnold
Was that the assassin

Shouted in Latin
As he leapt on the stage.
This convinced Matthew
There was still hope for America.

NOT NEGOTIABLE

Gold is real money;
Bills are not.
Yet, in nine shops out of ten,
If you offer a gold piece
They are vaguely disturbed:
They would prefer the familiar greenback
And anxiously suspect
They are being diddled.
Observe the fable,
You literary men!

MALADIE DU SIÈCLE

All day long, said the Old Mandarin,
I closed myself in my study, to think;
And all day long
I was aware of the telephone in the next room
Coiled there like a rattlesnake
Ready to strike.

VOICES IN THE FOG

Now returns the season of misty mornings:
From this inland pagoda, before my breakfast,
I hear the boats whistling
In the Gulf of Shi-pa-hoy.
What mellow groaning and musical interchange!
They sound to me like the cries of philosophers
Plaintively feeling their dangerous way
Through the fogs of metaphysical error.
I seem to hear
The soft faint drone of Confucius,
The confident boom of Lord Bacon,
The perplexed rumble of Coleridge,
The hoarse jarring mutter of Schopenhauer,
The clear siren of Santayana,
The shrill hoot of Voltaire!

HIC SUDAVIT SED NON FRUSTRA

The girl in the apartment next door
(After assiduous practice)
Has really mastered one piece on the piano—
A rollicking, meaningless, pseudo-highbrow air,
Full of stolen cadences, synthetic harmony,
And, where the composer was doubtful,
Padded with plenty of bass chords.

Just now I came up in the elevator
With a young man.
He rang the bell of the next apartment
And was friendly welcomed in.
By the time I was in my sitting room
I heard her dashing off her piece
With spontaneous abandon.
O Confucius, O Shakespeare, O Louisa M. Alcott
and Alfred Dunhill,
Will life never pull anything new?

STRATEGY

When, in my youth, I studied the law,
I learned that a skilful advocate
Arranges his argument so that the opposition
Will make just the replies he desires.

Even so in a restaurant
The waiter brings your change
Cunningly composed of quarters
Facilitating
A generous tip.

NO ANSWER

Again and again (said the Old Mandarin)
As I pace my garden walks
My favourite Tonkin spaniel

Hopefully lays a stick at my feet,
Imploring my attention for a game.
Deep in thought, I pay no heed.

Just so, I reflect,
Simple men lay offerings, sacrifices, prayers,
At the altars of their gods,
Gaze wistfully for a sign.
There is no sign:
The gods walk gravely on,
Deep in thought.

Even the collapse of the Woolworth Building
Would not placate the Law of Gravity.

COMPLACENCE

And yet (he continued)
Dogs are not always the emblems of humility.
I have seen men of great pride,
But none who rode this planet
As grotesquely complacent
As a solitary chow
In the rear of a limousine.

PRAGMATISM

When Chancellor Mu Kow and I were ennuyés
We used to go to the windy hill
And fly paper kites.
"Have you considered, Tremendous One"
(I asked him),
"The paradox of a kite?
To make it soar steadily
You must weight it down with a tail;
And to keep the spirit lofty, it is well . . ."
—"Do not, I beg you"
(Replied the Great Magistrate),
"Unsettle me with analogies.
You have only to meditate and watch the goldfish,
I must govern a province."

BURLESQUE SHOW

Curious how often you see a man
Who seems a blemished caricature of some other person.
There is a coolie
Who cleanses my fishponds:
He looks exactly like the faintly degraded replica
Of my friend the Chancellor—

With all his Excellency's keenness, wit, and assurance
Blurred and rubbed out.
Nature, to be sure,
Is the great Burlesquer.

WEAKNESS

If you approach me
I shall cheerfully promise
More than I can perform:
For I have my frailties.

But withinward, my soul
Evades, eludes, recedes;
And you must not be peevish—
I have my own secrets to pursue
And so have you.

TESTAMENT OF NO SHO

Prithee (cried No Sho, the young poet)
Shut out the baby:
Don't let her come into my thinking-room
She is a darling
And her every movement is a loveliness;
But how can I afford to look at her—

I, who already have notes for hundreds more
poems
Than I can ever write.

For I have had moments
When every form and colour of life
Seemed bursting with naked poetry—
Broadway for the taxis,
Columbus for the L,
But Amsterdam's the Avenue
Where trucks go down like hell——

And there are so many lovely poems being written
I am amazed:
For how do the darling poets find time and chance
to live them,
Those moments of millennium
When the mind ignites the hand?
But for this was I born
And for this came I into the world
To blow from the slippery suds of life
My bubbles of fragile glee.

CONTRADICTION

I saw a man about to write a poem:
He trod ruthlessly down a subway car,
Leaving behind him, left and right,

Macerated corns
And anguished faces.
Twenty minutes later
He wrote a lyric
Of exquisite tenderness.

EXEMPT

In a subway car
I saw a girl reading the *New Republic.*
Her long dark lashes
Were bent above an article
Called "The Surplus Woman."
She was temptingly beautiful
And she smiled upon the text
With gentle assurance and security.

MEDITATIONS ON POETRY

Poets seem to be much in demand.
Drawing room evenings, women's club meetings,
Literary luncheons, Chamber of Commerce dinners,
Wherever two or three sandwiches are gathered together
There is always a poet
Exchanging his "message"

For an equivalent bulk
Of chicken chow mein
And jellied sharks' fins.
All this is proof
Of a widespread hunger,
And not merely on the part of the poet.

A PRAGMATIST

The American poet Lindsay
(A mercurial fellow)
Began his career
By codifying the ways in which a poet
Can get a free meal.
Here was a seer!
Here was a man with strong grasp of essentials!

A HAPPY LIFE

The American poet Whitman
Did little to assist the razor industry,
But he erected a plausible philosophy
Of indolence
Which, without soft concealments,
He called *Loafing*.
This so irritated the American people
(Who were busy putting up buildings

And tearing them down again)
That they never forgave him.
He was deficient in humour,
But he had a good time.

A NATIONAL FRAILTY

The American people
Were put into the world
To assist foreign lecturers.
When I visited them
They filled crowded halls
To hear me tell them Great Truths
Which they might as well have read
In their own prophet Thoreau.
They paid me, for this,
Three hundred dollars a night,
And ten of their mandarins
Invited me to visit at Newport.
My agent told me
If I would wear Chinese costume on the platform
It would be five hundred.

THE MAN WITH THE RAKE

It is queer to think that many people
Have never raked leaves.
On a brilliant Sunday morning in October

I admired trees as ruddy as burnt orange,
Trees as pale and clear as Sauterne.
Raking placidly
I enjoyed the crisp rustle.

That is what I like about raking leaves—
It is wine and opiate for the mind:
The incessant skirmish of the wits is calmed,
And as you rake and burn
And dodge, with smarting eyes
The pungent, veering reek,
You fall into a dull easy muse,
And think to yourself,
After all, what is writing books
But raking leaves?

And at such times
I plant the seeds of poems.
It takes poems a long while to grow—
They lie germinating in the dark of the mind;
But next spring, very likely,
There may emerge the green and tender shoots
Of two or three bright stanzas.

VERITAS VOS DAMNABIT

It is the mark of extreme youth
To believe that telling the Whole Truth
Is always useful.
Truth is not a diet
But a condiment.

ANOTHER POSTPONEMENT

Once, on a midnight of rain and gale,
When the windows rattled in the hollow darkness,
I was in the kitchen
Eating cold turkey and cranberry sauce
Frisked from the icebox.
My mind was clear and busy:
Then, I suppose, I came as near as I ever shall
To being ready to write a great poem. . . .
But I lay down on my couch to meditate
And was soon fast asleep.

ADVANTAGE OF A BOOKISH UPBRINGING

When the wine has done its rosy deed
(As the reputable English poet said)
I enjoy to study in tranquillity

The lovable absurdities of men.
And then my familiarity with literatures
Besteads me well,
Affording me always a scholarly explanation
For conduct seemingly eccentric.

Once, I remember,
After an evening in which Chancellor Mu Kow
and myself
Had repeatedly toasted the loveliness of the moon,
Condoling her solitude
In the wide pale sky,
I lay in a perfection of comfortable thought
In a gently revolving cabbage field.
But my wife's parents
Heading the search party
Discovered me there, and cried lamentation and
oxytones.
Be of good cheer, I said:
It is with me as with the great Flaubert
Who pernoctated in a cabbage patch
Noting down, for purpose of literature,
The tincture of moonshine
On the leaves of the vegetables.
Even so, I sacrifice myself for realism.
Tenderly they carried me in.

$(a+b)^2$

Marriage is the square of *a* plus *b*
In other words
$a^2 + b^2 + 2ab$
Where *2ab* (of course)
Are twins.

SECRET THOUGHTS

And while my visitor prattled
I courteously nodded;
My eye was fast upon him,
My face bright with attention;
But inwardly I was saying:
"The excellent fellow, why does he tell me all this?
What has this to do with me?
O Buddha, when will he depart?"

IRRITATION OF THE OLD MANDARIN

There was another reporter
(A young woman, this time)
Who came to my hotel to ask whether
The Fine Art of Self-Salesmanship

Had made much progress in China?
I said, "Dear young Madam,
As regards ladies, our language has for that Fine Art
An ugly word.
As regards Aggressive Business Men
I can only say,
Caveat Emptor."

BIVALVES

The pearl
Is a disease of the oyster.
A poem
Is a disease of the spirit
Caused by the irritation
Of a granule of Truth
Fallen into that soft gray bivalve
We call the mind.

ETERNITY AND THE TOOTH

In regard to Eternity (said the Old Mandarin)
I feel about it as I do about one of my teeth.
Every now and then it gives me
A devil of a twinge,
And for a while

I groan and can think of naught else.
Then the anguish abates and I dismiss it from my mind.
But I know, just the same,
That some day
I've got to go through with it.

A PROVERB

We have a saying in China
That a man will wash his hands cleaner for visitors
Than he will for the family.
Even so,
He who is full of sententious wisdom in public
May be dark and doubtful within.

THE TOLERATOR

From time to time
I have laid my heart bare before you
And you did not like it.
So I must point out to you
It is *my* heart, not yours.

My wrongness, perhaps,
Is dearer to me
Than your rightness.

Yet you must not think
That when I disagree with you
I dislike you.
On the contrary:
I love you for having ideas of your own.
I know how you came to have those ideas,
And they are precious to you.

THE PAINTER

I talked with a young painter,
And as we came along Beekman Street
My eye dwelt upon the shining audacity
of the Woolworth Building.
But he was peering downward along the curb
Where were clear pools of melted snow.
"See!" he cried,
"That's how it ought to be painted!"
There, reflected in a long panel of water,
Sharp and exquisite, was the pale tower—
Enriching every puddle in the neighbourhood.

True! I said—
Beauty is like the Medusa:
Look her in the face, and you run mad;
But, like Perseus,
Study her reflection in the polished shield.
Look upon life in the mirror of some art
And, perhaps, you will stay sane.

THE POET

I talked with a poet
Who had just cashed a royalty check.
"In the last six months," he boasted,
"They sold thirty copies.
I tell you, it warms the cockles
Of my right-hand trouser."

VARIATIONS ON BUDDHIST SAPPHICS

If it should happen in somebody's office
That you were offered a noggin of cognac
And had to drink it in a cup of cardboard,

You would not dare to degust it leisurely:
You must drink fast, before the vivid essence
Ate through the seam of the chaste little vesicle.

So if we propose, my frolicsome people,
To pour great poetry in the crimped paper
Sterilized lilycups of daily behaviour,
Series of neat little days from containers,
Caulk them with paraffin—
Or drink in a hurry.

ADJUSTMENT

In your Great City
I see, in jewellers' windows,
Clocks that tell the guaranteed Correct Time;
And in front of those clocks people always halted
Adjusting their watches.
But suppose there were displayed, beside the street,
Some great poem,
Telling perfect Truth or Beauty,
How many passengers
Would pause to adjust their minds?

THE SURF

We took the baby
(Three years old)
To the beach at Lloyd's Neck.
A cold northern day and the wind was crisping surf on the beach.
She looked at the white foam
And heard its rhyming prosody.
"Snow," she announced.
"Snow saying, Sorrow to come in,
Sorrow to come in."

ANTICRASTINATION

On my way to your theatres, said the dubious Old
Mandarin,
I see To-morrow's papers already on sale
At eight o'clock To-night.
So does your strange mad city
Leap hotly towards the Future,
Tossing aside each Day before it is finished,
Hungrily, fatuously, craving the next.
Is it possible that the Editor
Is dissatisfied with each and every of his irreplace-
able To-days
That he hurries To-morrow so close upon its heels?

SUGGESTION

For Dancing and Dining, said the Old Mandarin,
I like to go to that chophouse
Where the couples, circling merrily,
Continually pass a sign,
Posted beside the dancing floor:
Exquisite Vegetable Dinner.
It seems, he said,
To make carnal thoughts impossible.

PROGRAMME NOTE FOR A COSMIC MELODRAMA

The creator requests the audience
Not to divulge the solution
Of the mystery on which the action is founded.
Future patrons
Will more greatly relish the dénouement
If kept in suspense
Till the final curtain.

THOUGHTS IN THE GULF STREAM

Who has described the wave
Crisping oblique from *Caronia's* bow
In clear summer midnight?
Brighter than snow the crumble, the running curling crumble
Flung by her wedgy stem:
Then a hollow, a lovely bending hollow,
Which swells up to a spread, an outward comb of breaker
Drawing veins and stripings
After it through the black:
And the little phosphor-sparkle,

The seethe along her side,
All this has never been properly described
Because no passenger ever sees it
With detached and watchful mind.
None of them
In clear summer midnight
Ever sees it alone.

ANXIETY

It worries me
To hear people cough late at night
For then I know they are lying awake
And probably thinking
And it troubles me to think about people thinking
Alone, in bed, at night.

NONE OF MY BUSINESS

I saw a satisfied bee
Blissfully asleep in a hollyhock flower.
I tickled him with a straw
To see if he would wake,
And then I was ashamed
Realizing how gravely I had been infected
By your American passion for interfering
In other people's affairs.

No harm was done, however—
He only grumbled affectionately
And turned over on the other side.

DISTRIBUTION OF CREDIT

It is certainly true
(Admitted the Old Mandarin)
That a great proportion of meritorious poetry
Was inspired by beautiful women,
But it would never have been actually written
Without black coffee.

MATIN AU LUXEMBOURG

Oh Medici Fountain,
Sombre in your aisle of leaves, where confused shadow
Aggravates young artists;
Where Sorbonne students read intermittently
And trysting lovers
Sorrow about many things—
In your dusky basin the Parisian sparrows
More hygienic than most natives of the Quarter
Begin the day with a bath.

HOURS OF AFFLUENCE

And in the Métro—the Paris subway—
They have the prettiest verbal nicety:
They call Rush Hours
Les Heures d'Affluence.

ANXIETIES OF A PURSER

Never let a glass keep ringing
Is a sea superstition.
A tumbler, accidentally tingled so that it chimes
Must be stilled at once, or it means bad fortune.
Evenings in the old *Echolalia*
How we used to keep our host, the purser, leaping
from side to side,
By surreptitiously ticking our glasses.
There was only one way for him to avert ill omen—
Keeping our goblets full.

A LITTLE SICKNESS

At the back of the flower-bed
I find a washed-out flake of cardboard—
An imitation daffodil.
And I remember, with a little sickness in my heart,

That when the children
Had gaily picked most of those new trembles of April
I bade them fabricate facsimile daffodils
With cardboard and crayon
And stick them in the ground in place of the ravished ones.
I wanted them to learn that beauty
Once plucked up, can't quite be replaced.
"Old enough to know better," I told them sternly—
Ah, poor fool,
As though anyone ever was!

TO C. H. P.

Cross-legged in pyjamas on the floor at one A. M.
Under an electric light
I was enjoying some Japanese poetry.
Suddenly the light went out:
Through the tracery of the oak tree
I saw the old moon rising,
One burning star balanced in a cool chink,
Heard the steady thrill of the crickets—
A hokku, a very hokku!
There, unguessed and unregarded
Had been the perfect essence of what I was admiring

In mere paper and ink.
This is very important, I said,
As I stared at the fragile night.
The bulb went out on purpose to teach me
Not to take the translation for the original.

THE NEW MOON FEELING

How is it, by what incalculable instinct,
That now and then, in a clean afternoon,
By some touch of air or slope of twilight,
Without previous thought I say to myself
(And am unerringly right)
It feels as if
There were a New Moon.

CAVE CANEM

Taking my evening stroll
I cautiously keep to the woodland alley
Turning back before reaching the neighbours' houses
To avoid startling any of the dogs.
It might be well, I ponder,
If one could do thus in the mind also,
Warily retracing one's thoughts
Before arousing the outcry
Of some indignant hound.

MEDITATION ON THE HEARTH

A householder who has once
Had a fire in the chimney
Will perhaps be careful
Before he again puts a match
To a bundle of excelsior.

VIGILIAE ALBAE

Now I am silent and my name is Tacitus.
But in this douce brightness
I have to pause now and then
Putting the moon behind the pine tree
To give myself respite
From her cruel and insinuating lustre.
O moon, scratch-pad of poets,
More meant against than meaning!

TICK DOULOUREUX

I am wounded
In a fatal artery.
The vein of Time is cut,
The minutes are bleeding, bleeding away.
Bartender, make me a tourniquet for this hemorrhage
Or I shall tick to death.

DEATH OF A JOURNALIST

Midway of this mortal life, the fellow
Met something he had never known before—
A region, very wide and deep, of Silence.

His notion was, at first, to write a sonnet:
Sonnet in Praise of Silence.
Yes, you smile,
But he smiled first. He didn't finish it:
He only wrote eight lines. Oh well, perhaps
That's the finest tribute I can pay him.

NO SHO AND HIS FRIENDS

NO SHO AND HIS FRIENDS

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE [1920]

IT IS with some reluctance that I accede to the publisher's entreaties to put these translations before the world of polite letters. I am painfully aware that my knowledge of Chinese is rather rudimentary, based as it is largely on laundry slips. I cannot help having a suspicion that there are a good many of the 40,000 ideographs with which I am not sufficiently familiar. But my readers will sympathize when they realize the difficulties of the task which I have set myself. It is disconcerting, when spending an evening translating the pearly and beautifully scalloped epigrams of No Sho or Mu Kow or Po Lil Chile, to find that the character which I thought (by comparison with my codex of laundry slips) must mean *a pair of pyjamas*, would, if so translated, give a regrettably intimate and informal tone to the verse. It is true that relying entirely on this laundry slip glossary somewhat restricts the scope of my translation; and therefore I have not scrupled to do as other devotees of Chinese verse, and when

in doubt as to the exact meaning of a phrase I have always translated it *a bowl of jade filled with the milk of the moonlight.*

Most interesting of all, it will be agreed, is the fact that the translations establish beyond cavil that the authors of these poems are men very much like ourselves. Most of the Chinese poetry that has been translated is of a querulous or bibbing sort: it gives an unfair picture of a high-spirited and proud race, representing them as eternally moaning about maidens with finger-nails shaped like filberts, lotus leaves in the moonshine, and death by excess of wine. The Chinese poets I here introduce have not been taken up by the poetical coteries, because they are of the more satiric sort; they are the humorists of China. No Sho, for example, was a sort of private columnist to an eminent mandarin of the P'un dynasty. It was his duty to write, every day, a number of paragraphs, epigrams, wheezes, and ditties, and bring them in the afternoon to his patron's tea-house. Here he would read them aloud to the mandarin and his guests as they sat at their wine and watermelon seeds. After each item was read, there would be a little music on the Chinese zither, and the assembled company would discuss the possibility of No Sho's work being taken up by the Women's Clubs of America. One day, however, in a fit of pique because the audience did not sufficiently applaud

one of his apothegms, No Sho leaped out of the tea-house into the lake. He did not really intend to destroy himself, but only to give his employer a fright, thinking thereby to get his salary raised; but the water lilies (which are so frequently described in Chinese poetry) were very thick in that pond, their stems got entwined round his neck, and he perished. It was obvious that his death was not suicide, for he had carefully laid his manuscripts on a bench before jumping, and after the excitement (and the poet) had subsided it was found that among the papers was a stamped addressed envelope directed to Lady Editor, Well Known Pottry Magazine, Chicago. In spite of the utmost efforts of the Postmaster General it was not possible to find out who was meant by this; and No Sho's manuscripts were at last sold by the Dead Letter Office; in which way they came to my hands.

Any proceeds from the sale of these translations will be applied to increasing and codifying my collection of laundry slips.

THE TRANSLATOR.

RECIPROCATION

One good nocturne
Deserves another,
Said George Sand
When she met Chopin.

AN EJACULATION

Genius, cried the commuter,
As he ran for the 8:13,
Consists of an infinite capacity
For catching trains.

PANORAMA OF A HAPPY EVENING

SIX O'CLOCK

When the frogs clear their throats
Like old club members,
And the fireflies
Punctuate the dusk with a network of brightness,
Hasten, boy, to His Excellency Mu Kow,
And ask him to join me
In a trifling merriment.

And be careful
To stretch two white ropes
Along the path,
Lest, when His Excellency totters homeward in the darkness,
He fall in the canal.

EIGHT O'CLOCK

Welcome, Excellency, welcome!
You do me too much honour!
Lay aside your robe and we will sit in the pagoda.
Throw your lip over these pickled sharks' fins.
I pray you, be at your ease:
Let this evening be conducted on a high philosophical plane.
The great Confucius, as you were saying, put it neatly:
Prohibition cannot harm me,
I have wined to-day.

NINE O'CLOCK

Yes, Excellency, you have said it:
We live but once.
Boy! Some more of those curried snails!
How warm this moonlight is.
By all means, Excellency, take off your shirt
If you will be more comfortable.

TEN O'CLOCK

Admirable, admirable!
To speak sooth, Excellency, I had no idea
That you could do the Shan-Tung saraband with such spirit
But—you will pardon me for mentioning it—
Let me clear away the broken glassware
Before you dance barefoot on the table.
The Emperor would never forgive me
If you should wound yourself—
Yes, I can see you perfectly from here.
It is very comfortable here, under the table.

ELEVEN O'CLOCK

Boy, boy! Make haste!
I *begged* His Excellency to tread with care.
Woe is me! His Excellency insisted on catching a cool, slippery eel
To lay against his heated forehead.
Hasten, boy, hasten!
His Excellency
Has fallen into the canal.

PRUDENCE

Help! Mad dog! cried someone.
I hastened swiftly
In the opposite direction.
Wisdom, I murmured,
Is better than rabies.

SAFE AND SANE

My theology, briefly,
Is that the Universe
Was Dictated
But not Signed.

LEGES SINE MORIBUS VANAE

The Ten Commandments
Are not really commandments,
But they are valuable
Suggestions.

A BURNING BOSOM

Sitting in this tea-house,
Looking out on the clear cool water
And the silver lilies,

How I wish I could press a dripping lily-pad
On my burning bosom
To ease me of my smart.
A broken heart, you ask, Mar Quong?
No, no, a mustard plaster.

INGRATITUDE

Bearing Walt Whitman in mind,
I intend to say
On my deathbed:
"I regard my poems as
My *carte de visite*
To posterity."
It is sad to have to add
That posterity will reply
"Not at home."

SILHOUETTE OF A HUSBAND

Ladies classify husbands
Into two classes:
Those who are "attentive,"
And those who are not.
I fear I am of the latter,
For I never can remember
My home telephone number.

But my friend Chang Jo
Always knows his home number.
He calls up so often to say
"My dear,
I will not be home to dinner this evening."

CONFESSION

Whenever I meet a handsome man
I have an irresistible impulse
To look at the nearest mirror.
The most satisfying form of art
Is contrast.

HANDICAPPED

Life is a game of whist
Between Man and Nature
In which Nature knows all Man's cards.
Well, suppose I try you out on trumps,
Says Nature,
Leading the mating instinct.

THE CODE

Those fireflies sparkling in the willows,
Here, there, here, there;
Those frogs piping in the moonlit pond,
Tweedle, tweedle, tweedle—

There seems to be a persistent method in it.
What is the code?
Is Nature trying to get across some message to me?

THE POINT OF VIEW

When the birch tree was cut down
The birds came and sat on the trunk
And gossiped.
In this tree I found the largest caterpillar I ever ate,
Said the robin.
In this tree I met my first wife,
Said the wren.

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT

One of the penalties
Of being a human being
Is
Other human beings.

ADVICE

Never try to tell people anything
Unless
They know it already.
Even then,
It is well to refrain.

WHILE IN THE MOOD

If there is any kind of poetry
I haven't written,
You might tell me about it,
And I'll do some.

TO THE BROWNING SOCIETY OF SHANGHAI

Be cruel to poets, and don't let them think
You like their preposterous patterns in ink;
For poets write better when not overfed:
The time to praise poets is after they're dead

POETS EASILY CONSOLED

The anguishes of poets are
Less grim than other men's, by far:
When other men can only curse,
The poet puts his woes in verse.
And Yee Lee, though at first the pang was smart
When by his friend Wu Wu his bride was stolen,
Soon asked which best expressed a broken heart,
A dash, a comma, or a semi-colon?

AN ARISTOCRAT OF THE P'UN DYNASTY

Just as the beheading was all ready to begin,
"What was *your* offence?" they asked the ancient mandarin.
The mandarin smiled grimly, as on his knees he sank
"My offence?" he whispered: "Ah, my offence is —rank."

THE ASTRONOMER TO HIS MISTRESS

Thou art my earth, and I thy moon,
In orbit ever true to thee:
O grant thy planet may come soon
To his ecstatic perigee.

AUTUMN COLOURS

How tedious it seems, and strange,
That poets should be raving still
Of autumn tints: it's just the change
From chlorophyll to xanthophyll.

REFLECTION

Women use shop windows to look through,
Admiring the goods displayed.
Men use them to look at,
Finding them agreeable
As mirrors.

THOUGHT ON CONVERSING WITH A PROMINENT STATESMAN

It is all right for a man
To be absent-minded,
But his mind shouldn't overstay
Its leave of absence.

QUERY

Who can alleviate
The joy of a social worker
Alleviating
The sorrows of the poor?

THE POWER HOUSE*

Every day I go past
The power house on Ludlow Street.
I look in the open windows
And see the great dynamos on their shelves.
They have power enough
To jazz the earth
And throw the planets out of step,
But they make no sound.
I saw a girl with shell goggles
Dusting some of them, unterrified
By her proximity
To such dangerous engines.
Look out, child, *look out!*
Don't get too near the Bernard Shaw circuit-breaker
Or the Walt Whitman flywheel!

ON A PAIR OF SPATS LAID AWAY FOR THE SUMMER

Little spats,
Down among the summer mothballs
Do you hanker for the time

*The Chinese poet refers here, in his oblique fashion, to the Mercantile Library in Philadelphia.—THE TRANSLATOR.

When you will once more
Encase her bright ankles
As they glimmer up and down
Chestnut Street?
Your gain will bé our loss,
But don't be dogs in the manger,
Little spats!

THIS INCONSTANCY IS SUCH

Chestnut Street is dark and gloomy 11:30 P. M.
But from an upper window
Comes the insane ecstasy of jazz.
Cling-cling of little bells,
Rattle of drums,
Tick-tock of the gourds,
Crash of cymbals,
Wail of violins on the placid night.
Life is tragic;
Life is damnable;
But I do a little scamper of my own
There on the pavement.

MISDIRECTED ZEAL

When I am at work in the office
A kind of palsy seizes on my soul.
I feel the whole weight of the universe
Crushing down on my defenseless spirit;

But when I get home at night
And it is time to go to bed,
I am as brisk as a ticket seller
In the box office of a vaudeville show.
In the sheer lustihood of my exuberance
I rearrange all the bottles in the medicine closet,
And with the zeal of Russell Conwell
Delivering "Acres of Diamonds" for the 5000th time,
I have been known to pursue a cockroach
From one end of the apartment to the other.

ON WATCHING HIS STENOGRAPHER

If only the mechanism of society
Were as simple as a typewriter,
And the management of affairs
Could be transposed
From Capital to Lower Case
By pressing a shift key!

A PLACID DISPOSITION

I can always keep my temper
When I'm alone.
It's only other folks
That rile me.

A DISCOVERY

The worst moment
In my life
Is when I am cleaning up the cellar
And find my magenta tie,
Three frayed soft collars,
And the dear old brown pair of trousers
In the trash-box
Where my wife put them.

BREAKING THE RULES

I know a merchant
Who is an offence to all Rotarians.
He began business on a shoestring,
And yet he is not successful.

THOUGHTS OF A MIDDLE-AGED MANDARIN

Breaking in a new idea
Is like breaking in a new pipe:
Uncomfortable work.
I like the old familiar thoughts,
No bite or parch.

BUDDHIST LULLABY

My mind is an apartment.
When it is all dark,
And I am about to sleep,
Who is that walking
On the floor overhead?

THE REELING BRAIN

My mind is a movie film.
Who the camera man was,
I don't know,
But he certainly shot
Some queer pictures.
I always fear
That some day the film will snap
And the audience
Will applaud ironically.

CONFUCIUS CONFUSED

I've been taking dictation
From the universe
For quite a while.
I've got a bunch of notes:

Now it's time to transcribe them.
Queer—
I can't seem
To make sense out of them.

CAUTION

My mind needs no fire escape.
It is equipped with automatic sprinklers.
As soon as an idea catches fire
They put it out.
I am heavily insured against
Inflammatory notions.

STEAM SHOVEL NEEDED

My mind is like the Panama Canal.
Great ocean-going ideas
Lie moored in the locks
Until my thought rises to the level
Where they can proceed.
Every now and then
There is a brainslide in the Culebra Cut
And all traffic is halted.

UNEASINESS

Sometimes when I am writing poetry
I have an uncomfortable feeling
That I am about to be
Interrupted
By a flash of prose.

PESSIMISM

I always ask
At least three trainmen
If this is the right train for where I am going.
Even then,
I hardly believe them.

LACK OF BALANCE

The Prune Exchange Bank
Refused my account
Because I tried to deposit
A dew-spangled cobweb
And a post-dated sunset.

ANNOUNCEMENT

My mind is closed pending repairs.
After alterations are completed,
Will reopen in these premises
With a large line of plain and fancy goods.

Here Ends This Complete Codex of Translations from the Chinese, Scrupulously Deciphered by Christopher Morley from the original cordiscript, and published by Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., in the year of Grace 1929. And both publisher and author invoke handsome generous blessing upon anyone who actually buys it.

TOULEMONDE

WOOING SONG FOR SIR TOBY

When Phyllis laid her smock to bleach
Along the hawthorn prickle,
Her senseless linen soon did teach
My fancy how to tickle;
Then first methought what pretty charms
That shift would be enfolding—
Ah, better for a shepherd's arms
To have such jocund holding:
In every tree the birds cry, Doxy,
Love was never done by proxy.

The empty wind that puffs her weed
Is too indifferent squiring;
More corporal is maidens' need
To tumble their attiring.
The cuckoo tells his leman's clock
And summer's getting weather—
Ah, speed the day when shirt and smock
Lie on the hedge together:
In every tree the birds cry, Doxy,
Love was never done by proxy.

YOUNG AMHERST'S MADRIGAL

(For Jocunda Vassar)

Such strong silence I had learned,
  When to cloak, when to dissemble
Passionate desires that burned,
  Lonely nights that made me tremble.

So, accustomed to disguise,
  Taught by distance and transgression,
When at last I met your eyes
  I spoke still with some discretion.

Then the sudden triumph grew:
  I by merriment was chidden—
I don't need to hide from you
  Thoughts that just for you were hidden.

THE PEANUT ROASTER

(On Beekman Street)

A peanut oven far down town
  (Adjoining Civic Virtue)
Raised up his little steaming snout
  In a song whose pathos hurt you.

By chewing gum and orangeade
And other wares of humble trade
  Congenially surrounded,
He lifted up his plaintive voice
To woo the idol of his choice
  And they were much astounded
To hear him whistle all day long
This pitiful mismating song:—

I have no lust for the Bankers' Trust
  Or even the Transportation,
For I am cursed with passion's worst,
  A love above my station.
And so I cry to the One Most High,
  All pinnacles and gilding—
The Equitable will not do,
  I want the Woolworth Building.

Oh most ironic was his fate,
  His troth could not be plighted,
For though above his head there hung
  A big red sign, UNITED,
Yet no magician's wand could e'er
Unite that ill-assorted pair
  Or satisfy his yearning:
The Woolworth never even knew
What agonies his heart went through
  With red-hot peanuts burning,

Nor heard him whistle all day long
His pitiful mismating song:—

I have no 'ust for the Bankers' Trust
Or even the Transportation,
For I am cursed with passion's worst,
A love above my station.
And so I cry to the One Most High,
All pinnacles and gilding—
The Equitable will not do,
I want the Woolworth Building!

EPIGRAMS IN A CELLAR

1. Clos Vougeot 1911

Clad in full velvet, enters Clos Vougeot,
Of lineage that none but he forgets,
And with the grace that none but he can show
Salutes you with a bunch of violets.

2. Chambertin 1911

Chambertin! Methinks, a whit superb—
His bearing both inheritance and art:
Yet, argued with, remark the mien acerb—
He hides a touch of satire in his heart.

3. Clos Vougeot 1923

This Young Vougeot, as gay as Chaucer's
Squire,
Boyish in faults, for youth will always err;
But ah, what blend of tenderness and fire
When this our Damoiseau becomes Seigneur.

4. Chablis Moutonne 1915

Lady, I think you are Chablis Moutonne
A miracle of ether and bouquet:
Such colour as men feast their eyes upon
And then, too deeply troubled, look away.

5. Corton 1915.

(*With a dead spider, crystallized in white limestone moistures, clinging to the bottle*)

And here lies Corton, which Arachne chose
In the cold cellar, craving summer's heat,
And tried, and tried in vain, before she froze,
To warm on you her chilly little feet.

So to your spark of sunshine she expressed
More tribute than a hundred poets give:
On your dark shoulder let none break her rest,
A perfect little ivory adjective.

6. POUILLY 1915

Pouilly, I vow, is Madame la Marquise,
And when she enters let no wooer speak
But watch, with apprehension and unease
That faint flush of dominion on her cheek.

7. TACHE ROMANÉE 1915

Tache Romanée, whose lure one may explain:
Aristocrat in masquerade as wench—
See, underneath that purple gipsy stain
The silken lip, so amorously French.

8. NUITS ST. GEORGES 1915

Oh, Nuits St. Georges! Saint George of ancient time,
Saint George the strong embarrasser of dragons:
We also spear the reptile with a rhyme
And celebrate his obsequy with flagons.

9. MUSIGNY 1911

Musigny is the Muses' chosen bowl,
Pure element of Plato in potation:
Sets body into dialogue with soul
And rubricates their secret conversation.

SKY LINE

Under what star was granted me
To live immersed where I can see
Her terrible tall majesty?
Who fated it
That I should squander youth and wit
To see her blaze and ride so high
On peacock sky?

Wind of what hazard came to sow
My mortal dust where I could know
Her comedy, both high and low,
Her evenings lit
With pride and lustre infinite;
Servant of all her changing moods
And magnitudes.

Town of all towns earth ever knew,
Sierra man-made on the blue
Miraculous to thought and view,
I only ask
To make your madrigal my task
Where rhyming perpendiculars
Reach toward the stars.

Sorceress beyond compare,
City of glory and despair
So terraced on the Western air,
Your music pour
Over and round me evermore,
Symphony fatal and divine
City of mine.

INVOCATION to an AUDIENCE

Now for the moment are your minds removed
From everything but loveliness,
And you here present, if you've ever loved,
Loved and then wearied of that sweet distress,
You who have dearly proved
The arrow's sharpness and the archer's blindness
Remember still, as best behooved,
His lovingkindness.

I

HE CAN'T HAVE BEEN GONE LONG

I saw the little room, the dusty table,
The ashtray with its dump of burned tobacco,
And in the corner, underneath the desk,
The old galoshes that he never wears;
The littered papers, and the empty glass
Still moistured with a sweet illicit vapour—
He can't have been gone long.

And this, I said, was where he fought with words.
Here was where, after such idiot doubting,
The words began to come: He put them down
No more ashamed of his own bitter thought
Than startled by the secret thoughts of others;
Stared at the Bridge, the River and the Island
And said, See here, this needs no pretty trick
Of emphasis or art; this needs no fear
Of ridicule, for this is merely statement,
The blurted outcry of a dying man—
(All men are dying men, you might remember.)

He can't have been gone long—the ashtray
smoulders,
The chair's still warm. We may have passed each
other
In the elevators. I *must* find him,
He mustn't go like that, his heart all naked,
Exposed to beauty and alone, alone
In this terrific city where a million
Cruel chances hurry to rush in
Between him and his words.

God, if there's anything in me he needs
How proudly I can give. Conspue the thousand
Irrelevants of douce and chaste behaviour—
He needed me more than he needed God,
I gave him nothing.
(No, that's not true, and he would first deny it.)
He can't have been gone long.

I imagine that he cried out in amazement,
Staring in this little barren room:
What if the words should come!
After such an apoplex of silence
Suppose my words should come!
And in that disbelieving joy, dear fool,
Went out among too solid miracles
Carrying his fragile weight of words.

Happy people are much too defenceless.
He can't have been gone long? Perhaps you've
seen,
Random in this rectilinear city
Or singing in some subway vestibule
One inordinately happy man?
Yet, cunning rogue, he has the madman's gift
Of counterfeiting strong solemnity:
I've seen him with a thousand windy miles
Of rain and midnight darkness in his head
And still could pass a perfect offhand howdy
With the casual elevator man.

Perhaps no one can find him except I.
He can't have been gone long.

II

THE ILLUSION DIRECTOR

Bill, it was cert'nly queer about Toulemonde.
The 6.25 got in at the reg'lar time,
6.30; and he simply wasn't there.
Never did show up. I gave the papers
The usual obit-stuff. But you know, Bill,
What a frame-up that tripe always is.

Worst of it is, we never had our talk.
Pity we both were shy. I always planned
To get that guy backed off into a corner,
Crank him with some Bisquit Dubouché,
Pull out the choke, and let his engine run.
He needed it. In fragments of palaver
I'd catch his eye upon me, knew damn well
He had some curious matter to impart.
Some overset on his galleys, you might say.
Despite that air of telling all he knew
How little he really told. The odds and ends
That I remember, wouldn't make a story.
You know as well as I what makes a story.
Yes, too damn well we know. That's just our trouble.

He said, for instance, that in Bryant Park
There is a Sparrow Tree, right by the corner
Above the news-stand. Told me that that tree
Is simply black, at dusk, with crowded sparrows
Shouting some indignation of their own.
Plainly, he said, a sort of plebiscite,
Unanimous as a hurry of commuters;
And if I had a farthing, he remarked,
I'd buy two of them from the Park Department
And find out what the chirping's all about.
Sparrows often hang around by news-stands.
They feed on dung and then they climb a tree
And shout, he said. I wonder what he meant.

Sixth Av'nue always troubled him, I think:
Its shining verticals notched on opal light,
Great bulks of terrace, anxious to the mind.
Scientific American says a sign
In ruby red; opposite, *Duo Art*;
The Library lies low between the two.
He found some symbol there: I don't know what.
Even an office exit, marked as such,
Which read from outward TUO, pleased him oddly.
Particular hopes were vested in that office,
He liked to be tutoyer'd by a door:
The Latin dative was so intimate,
And so he always entered by the exit.
He had some notions, equally absurd,
About the gesticulating coloured maid
Who demonstrates a couch-bed in a window.
These trifles, I believe, he dwelt upon
To keep his mind from lingering on the fury
Of summits blazoned in such coloured light,
The pyre of his brave day. We'd had at least
Four Scotches when I heard him murmuring
"God, what a bonfire my Manhattan flames
To celebrate the fall of my dear day,
Sweet day that was my fortress, my renown,
My hold and keep against the troops of Time,
Now sieged and sacked and cindered, wreathed in fire,

I fugitive. Just so Aeneas saw
The pines of Ida burning over Troy."

Evidently, he was a little soused:
Sober, he did not like alliteration.
One night, near the Paramount, he said
"I wish that Matthew Arnold could have seen it."
Embarrassed to have seemed intelligentsia
He dived into the subway. Well you see
There was no real Story in these things.

But still it bothers me to think how many
Ideas he called "important" stayed unsaid.
He asked me once, the rascal, if I liked
The taste of eyebrows. Eyebrows, he alleged,
Were sweet to bite and made the daintiest crunch.
Outrageous, yes; quite a surprising phase;
And then he said, with sudden gravity
Forbidding chaff, that he saw Beauty once
"Laughing and pure and garmented with light."

Bill, another thing that bothers me:
I remember so much better what I said
To him, than what he ever said to me.
Some curious receptiveness in him
That drew me on to spill *my* fool confessions
Instead of hearing what he had to say.
And yet I call myself a good reporter—
Gosh, if we lived it over I'd keep still.
He had suspicions of the infinite,

As much as one can ask of any man.
The way he said that line sticks in my head . . .
"Laughing and pure and garmented with light."
Say, behind that much too jovial vein
I think he lived with marvel, and guessed more
Than he let on. Oh well, maybe we all do.
It's quite too much for me. Page Havelock Ellis!

I wrote him once; I was a little worried
About some kind of wildness in his manner,
His anchors weren't fluked down in holding ground.
Tell me if you're happy, Toulemonde,
I wrote. Yes, idiotic. He replied:
"Even the sweetest pipe, my dear old son,
Sometimes fills your mouth with nicotine.
But there's a lot of gorgeous Silence here,
I glut myself with Silence. It's rich diet,
Dyspeptic to my bowels. But one comfort
I have, and wish that all could say the same:
If ever I loved anyone on earth
I always made a point to tell them so.
It's dangerous. But what evenings I have had
Halfway between Orion and The Bear."

The other day, in a movie studio
I saw a queer arrangement of contraptions
For one of their trick photographic stunts.
Background, a dark screen cascading water;

A pool, made of a mirror, to reflect
Queer lights; a V-shaped aperture to look
Like jags of rock; and on a canted runway
(Whereon their massive camera would tilt)
There sat a pensive man who brooded sombre
On the validity of his device,
Whether the wenches in synthetic samite
Posing in that grot of carpentry
Would really give the effect that he intended
Of Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos.
Who is, I asked my guide, the troubled Dante?
It's The Illusion Director, they explained.

Illusion Director! How old Toulemonde
Would have enjoyed the little episode,
Found in it analogues for God Almighty,
And even for himself.
Say, listen Bill, some day let's get together
And talk about some queer stuff of our own.

INTERLUDE

DUETS IN A HOT BATH

"Assorted sorrows, anguish of all sizes"
Experienced man or woman recognizes,
But grievances that seemed quite unendurable
Prove, in the bathtub, humorous and curable.

My errors, said Jocunda the adorable,
Are obviously and painfully deplorable
But vanish hypochondrias and woes
When, soaking in the tub without my clo'es,
I admire the pink precision of my toes.
A good hot bath, and Coty's *Emeraude*
Will force old Satan to sing palinode.
(Though *Emeraude's* a bit pungent; I confess
I more esteem that stuff *Adieu Sagesse*.)

My favourite bathtub poet? William Blake
For porcelain penserosoes takes the cake:
Assuageable by Blake in recitative
Is every doubtfulness that makes you grieve—
Sedate or supine in my chaste caldarium
I detonate his songs and never vary 'em—

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child,
But I am black, as if bereaved of light.

Donny, the Emeritus Dog, is growing old:
Silent he lies, unmoving, by the hour,
Metabolized like Peter Ibbetson.
His happy tail, curled like a question mark,
Flaps softly when he hears familiar tread,
But otherwise he sprawls in perfect swoon,

After so many barkings, so much ire.
So shall I lie and simmer in the tub,
Translucented in warmth up to my chin.
I have no prayers to pray (One does not pray
Lying on one's back). I merely think:
"Oh William Blake, dead just a hundred years,
I look towards you." (What a lovely phrase,
I look towards you!) This is your centennial
And you and I'll observe it in the tub—

Never seek to tell thy love
Love that never told shall be;
For the gentle wind does move
Silently, invisibly. . . .

One night Donny and I lay by the fire:
There was a sudden hissing blowing sound,
Long streaks of gassy flame burst from the log—
Some juice of summer, vapourized by heat,
Broke out in streamers and thin jets of fire.
And this was comfort, though I don't know why:
It brought me back from my uneasy trance
To the strange sweetness of the natural world.
And Donny came, the shaggy reprobate,
And laid his hairy, wise, Socratic head
Silent in the angle of my arm.

Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!

I can't read William Blake without a shiver,
He gives my spine embroideries of chill:
So a hot bath's the place to think about him.
His syllogism is often enthymeme,
But fortified by the soapsuds and the steam
I sometimes know the meaning of his dream—
Or if I don't, don't care—

The weeping child could not be heard,
The weeping parents wept in vain
They stripped him to his little shirt
And bound him in an iron chain. . . .

Oh immortality of the early day,
Before the day is doomed; before the feeling
Of Time and Hurry fevers in its veins,
Before the phantom of To-morrow clouds it
(Which falls for the most part shortly after lunch;
And by the way, what irreparable harm
Tomorrows have done To-days)
Sing, child, your orison in the wholesome tub,
Think randoms, let your morning mind accost
Insolubles: what holds the heavy earth
Supported in its twirl in naked space?

Or, how are people clever at the tango
And lift their flexible ladies off the floor?

And by came an angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.
Then naked and white, all their bags left behind....

Blake's the fellow for singing in the bathtub!

III

THREE OLD-FASHIONED

What I always like about this place
(Said Toulemonde) is the array of tumblers
Standing on the shelf behind the bar,
All foundationed for Old-Fashioned cocktails;
Each with its orange slices and its cherry,
Pretty as an armada of old Spain.
Well, boys, this should be helpful for what ails you—
(If anything ails you: how am I to know?)

If anything ails us, they replied in duo,
And we're not saying if it does or no,
But if it should, this will be good for it.

I woke, he said, that morning, very tranquil.
With my first conscious breath there was a lightness,
A feeling that whatever weights had tilted
The tender scales of balance in my soul
Were counterpoised with little grams of laughter.
Sure and easy on that hinge of Time
I teetered in an equilibrium
And felt that some day I might still be merry—
Mind you, this needs careful explanation—

Sure, sure, this needs most careful explanation,
They chimed in chorus; and each one's bright eyes
Showed that he too was eager to explain.
He looked at them, a bit suspiciously,
Deciding to abbreviate the tale.

I mean to say (so he abridged his matter)
The beauty and the essence were still there,
But untormented. I was not afraid.
I well remember how I lay abed
Moveless in every muscle, full aware
Of every peace and sweetness man can know.
There's no great harm in getting used to silence:
We'll all have plenty of it in the end.
There was a golden taste that country morning;
A smell of cedars; crocuses were out.

He's got a table for three, one of them said.
Bring your glasses with you.—Yes, I know
Exactly how you felt. One day in London
In the fall of Nineteen Twenty-One—
But never mind. Go ahead, Toulemonde.

Oh tender, tender was the air that morning!
Quietly my pulse and nerves were different,
Life wasn't something always waited for,
This *was* Life; life itself, right here, right now,
And all incredible and natural things
I've ever known, were active in my mind
And I could see this comedy of earth
(Which sometimes seems adapted from the French
By a shrewd but not too skilled translator)
Premeditated to some *Tout s'arrange.*
And at that very moment, heaven help us,
A friend of mind chooses that day to send me
A beautiful and very special copy
Of Ronsard's poems—*La Muse de Ronsard.*
Ronsard, whom I thought I had forgotten
Since I was a boy at Fontainebleau—
Ronsard of the Odes and Odelettes,
Ronsard with his "longues nuicts d'hyver,"
His April seasons and his matchless sonnets
(Into the woods then with his girls and salads.)
Unhappy lovers always should be Frenchmen,
So sweet a tongue for any kind of pain!
That douce old French, so simple, sad, and honest,

Four hundred years adrift on April air,
Light as those cherry petals by the Loing
Along the woody skirts of Fontainebleau.
And all those little laughters, lusts and lyrics—
Waiter! another round of the Old-Fashioned.

Maybe you don't get the flavour of old French;
Or worse, much worse, maybe you've never known
Someone you wanted to address like this:—

Le soir qu'Amour vous fist en la salle descendre
Pour danser d'artifice un beau ballet d'Amour,
Vos yeux, bien qu'il fust nuict, ramenèrent le jour,
Tant ils sceurent d'esclairs par la place respandre.

Or this, which so many pens have imitated:—

Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, a la chandelle,
Assise aupres du feu, devidant et filant,
Direz, chantant mes vers, en vous esmerveillant:
"Ronsard me celebroit, du temps que j'estois belle!"

Or this, my boys (with a lively guttural
And plenty of rich cadence, he declaimed:—)

Ostez vostre beauté, ostez vostre jeunesse,
Ostez ces rares dons que vous tenez des cieux,
Ostez ce docte esprit, ostez moy ces beaux yeus,
Cet aller, ce parler digne d'une Deesse.

What's that "ostez" mean? I don't quite get that.

Ostez? Same as ôter. Take away.
But what d'you think of a man who sends you Ronsard
Just when you thought you'd found a little ease?
So I fell back into my pearly grievance,
My lovely horror and my dumb distress.
To-night I'll hear the whistle of the frogs,
The nightingales of our Long Island swamps.
I'll hear them flute their truisms, and have nothing.
Nothing at all, to contradict them with.
I'm done for. Yes, I'm low, boys, very low.

Say, when I was in Paris in Nineteen . . .
You talk of being low: look, here's a graph,
I'll draw it on the tablecloth, like this:
That's where I was in Nineteen; at the bottom;
Shot up like this, toward the spring of Twenty;
Then another gulf, I went down, down,
Clean off the table; but I've got it figured,
I'm coming back; not counting little zigzags,

The general trend is up; I look to be
Back close to normal, spring of Twenty Eight.
Waiter! This round's on me, then I must go.

Forgive me, Ronsard, if I had forgotten
Your power on the heart. Come with me now,
I know a place where sunshine warms the cedars,
A ring of white oaks, twisted by the wind,
Leans above stony beach. In juniper air
Clean with all northern savours, we'll confide
Some tender things that you well understand.

Well, so long Toulemonde. I'll see you later.
But just remember what a signal folly
It is to think of every work of art
As a thing done whole and integral,
Forgetting all the scraps and shreds of doing
By which we brought it to the finished round.

IV

MORE THAN A PLACE TO LIVE

More Than a Place to Live—A Way of Living....
That was the sign I saw (said Toulemonde)
Painted on a big New York hotel.
Alas! what boots it with uncessant care
To strictly meditate the thankless Muse

When some tough hardboiled Advertising Man
Strikes off at random such pentameter,
So perfectly hendecasyllabled,
So strong with Christ's (or Buddha's) inward truth.
Buddha under the figtree Ajapala
Might have said just that.

So in this town
Where men up-end their poetry on sky,
Flash it in chains of crawling yellow cars
Round Elevated curves on rainy nights,
No wonder the mere poet lags behind.
If even the chance phrases of her trading
Can utter such felicitous evangel,
How versify her pinnacled perspectives?
Vacate, my Muse! Like Milton's easy friend
I'm for the tangles of Neæra's hair.

It isn't tangled any more, I said.
She's had it cut. The word I'd use is——

Never mind what word *you'd* use, he cried.
I have my own. Don't take my word away.
It's all I have, to-night. I earned it, too.
Phew . . . great Heavens, man, you frightened me.

More Than a Place to Live—A Way of Living. . .
On every corner, if we don't look out,

These laughing architects and engineers
Will steal our thunder, and our lightning too.
While we were mumbling our uncertainties
They've shot their crisscross lattice in the blue.
Some prosody!

I know a peanut roaster
Down on Beekman Street, beneath the Woolworth:
Below that crickneck glimpse, hid in a corner,
It whines a little shrilling monotone,
A singsong like the chant a child will keen
To keep his courage up. By God, that's us,
Poets—Prometheus once, who stole God's fire,
Grilling goobers in a twirling oven,
Hissing little jets of plaintive steam.

Have you ever watched unpracticed actors
Tackle a passage written in blank verse?
Noticed how it frightens them, the darlings!
Oh yes, in ordinary sides of prose
Or rhymed in custom, we'll divulge ourselves
With manly declamation, unabashed.
But then suppose we have to take the stage
Aware of conscious beauty in the lines—
Frightened? I'll say we're frightened! Quite right, too:
Blank verse is no trick of elocution:
Blood must collaborate. The pause, the accent,

The ellipses and the run-on of the sense
You must divine. Perhaps it's life's own method—
Strict music underneath, but variation
In the individual technique.
It's not surprising that we're terrified
And drink our Beauty as we drink our Barsac
(This golden anæsthetic, smuggled in)
Furtive in some enclave of Italy.

I don't see anything furtive about this,
I couldn't help objecting, as I watched
The merry crowd of outlaws round the room.
Besides, Silenus, you can't always drink
Straight from the bottle's neck. You'd miss the
colour,
The shape and ceremony of the glass.
Maybe we poets haven't quite kept pace
With other climbing arts. But there you are,
They deal so close with actuality,
Drink life from the bottle. We must cool
Our vintage, pour it in the proper crystal,
Hold it to the light, and drink the toast.
See how that green is dabbled in the gold—

Good God, man, what can be more actual
Than the inward fury of the heart?
I knew a woman once, so beautiful
Butterflies came and perched upon her shoulder—

This seemed to me irrelevant. Besides
It started meditations of my own
That needed checking. So I merely said,
Do you recall that line of Walt's: "Hast thou,
Pellucid, medicine for case like mine?"

Yes, the pellucid is good medicine,
And Oh, I feel it working, feel it working:
Warm April night, trees not in folio,
When summer stars were crowded into spring—
Bare days when the white dazzle of the noon
Pressed cruelly on nerves, and one would pray
To be a terrier idle in the sun.
Yet ere some other April greens me over,
While braggart earth's still warm between my hands
I'll build a word or two—perhaps a poem
That even architects might compliment.
Tall enough and strong enough to lodge in
(More Than a Place to Live—A Way of Living)
And looking down from its high terraces
See all the taxies hurrying in the rain.

You and I, like a brace of dachshund firedogs,
Have carried burning faggots on our backs.
He smiled, and added: I daresay it's happened,
Sometimes, to the very nicest people.

Come then; let's go to dinner. We might try
Things unattempted yet in food or drink.

INTERLUDE

THE CORONER'S GOING A-MAYING

The Coroner brushed his hearthstone clean
And after the rain, in a garth grown green,
Not glad, not sad, in a mood between
The Coroner went a-Maying.

His fireplace swept of its winter's ash,
His barrels filled with a season's trash,
Where no intruder might abash
The Coroner's gone a-Maying.

This was the gravel pathway here
Where his mind made verdict, prompt and clear
Of what was hateful and what was dear
When the Coroner went a-Maying.

Strength came up from the sodden ground:
Himself was his May-pole, so he found;
With ribbons (the neighbours stood astound)
The Coroner went a-Maying.

Green jungle was covert round him there,
Wet lilac burdened the anxious air:
Nimbled with a proud despair
The Coroner went a-Maying.

To diagnose his own despite
He crowned himself with a garland bright
And capering brisk, as well he might,
The Coroner went a-Maying.

With a bow to you, and a bow to me,
In a ribald measure, one-two-three,
And a wench and priestess on each knee
The Coroner's gone a-Maying.

You shall not catch his eye, nor guess
What talisman of tenderness
His rite can justify and bless
When the Coroner goes a-Maying.

Not private malice, public mirth,
Nor any irrelevance on earth
Can dim that jewel of great worth
When the Coroner goes a-Maying.

The Maypole jig is something froward—
The jury finds his mien untoward:
The nun's priest's gaze is better lowered
When the Coroner goes a-Maying.

If some be nice, avert, I beg:
The rum is sweet in Cuba's keg,
The lasses show a comely leg
When the Coroner goes a-Maying.

His taste is evidently abnormal:
His temperament is much too thermal—
My dear, it's *terribly* informal
When the Coroner goes a-Maying.

So in those dusks, those crepuscules,
There sounds the Exorcism of Fools
Who never even guessed the rules
When Coroners go a-Maying.

The well-intending triple-starred
Dear fools who make life doubly hard
And are eternally debarred
When Coroners go a-Maying.

But there are fools of every station,
And so, to hide his desperation
And warm himself for fresh creation
The Coroner's going a-Maying.

Hark to his enigmatic rune
Set to a wanton wistful tune
While with transfusions of the moon
The Coroner's gone a-Maying.

With poison ivy on his head,
Leaving the better part unsaid,
Abandoning inquest on the dead
The Coroner's gone a-Maying.

V

CHIPMUNKS IN THE WALL

I hear their tiny feet: an airy scamper,
Light intramural frolic to and fro
Behind the solemn bookshelves, in the tunnels
Of lath and joist and beam. Inside the ceiling
They freak my silence with a lace of sound,
Patterns of chase and hurry and alarm,
Dry rustling skirmish among plaster alleys
Quick as the darting mischief of the mind.
Behind George Fox, John Woolman, Hobbes and Herrick
(More Herrick they than Woolman, Fox or Hobbes)
They carnival and dance their nights away.

And now it's late, the telephone won't ring,
I'm safe. I'm safe in silence. I can take
My little rolls of film, of reminiscence,
And (working in a cautious rosy gloom)
Bathe them in the necessary acids
And watch the pictures tenderly emerge;
Develop, tone and fix and wash and dry
Till they can face the White Light of the World.
Those films are full of static: as they whirl,
Winding and unwinding in the dark
You'll see them crackle with a running spark.

Which makes me think again about those chipmunks.
Skirmishing at random in the walls,
Suppose they gnaw the wires? In my old shack
The wiring's elderly, the whole shebang
Is veined with ribbons of potential fire.
Suppose, in casual sport, my antic rodents
Nibble through my crumbly insulations
And cause what (I believe?) they call Short Circuit,
A Ground, a homesick spark. All kinds of joy
Are hungry always to get back to earth,
So this blinking fidget of desire
Scintillates in peevish discontent,
Frets and stings his tindery surrounding—
And I, so much at peace upon my couch,
Awake to find the homestead wreathed in flame.
The naughty chipmunks perish, I suppose,
But the more awkward fact is, so do I.

If I were you, I'd hire an electrician.
But don't you love that old domestic question
So often asked, in bed, of drowsy men.
You shake a massive shoulder (you'd not guess
How big men's shoulders are, unless you've slept
Beside them)—
"George! George! Wake up; wake up, George!
It seems to me that I smell something burning?"

You smell the whole world burning; and it's queer
There's so much smoke and smell, so little flame.
In hearts as tough as gouty woodland stumps
Red Reason embers in the touchwood rot
And fills the parish with a fuming haze.
It taints the very ether of the sky.
It's got to be! Even the rudiment
Examples of combustion—such as poets—
Exhale more smudge and smoulder than clear fire.
How many random scribbles on the page,
Curlicues and margins and grotesques,
Before the good black text begins to show—
Oh so much woodpile and so little nigger!
All the pretty damnables men bury
In deepest ink: eyes altered in a night,
Little sweet shallows in the palms of hands,
Trembles in voices, and the Murphy Twins
Let down from Heaven in a folding bed.

Toulemonde, it's rash to talk like that.
I wonder if you ever heard what happened
When the fairies held their big Convention?
They organized a Posse of Pursuit
And lynched the people who write Fairy Tales.
Do you expect some premium for recalling
The things men had remembered to forget?

I visited a Broadway dance-hall once
Where carpenters were making alterations

While the dancing was still going on.
There was a workman there, in overalls,
Chewing a quid of pepsin. While the throng
Twirled and maneuvered on the spangled floor
And all the building drummed with syncope
He sawed and measured calmly; but I noted
That still with saw and jaw he kept the time,
Rocking the steel in rhythm with that yammer,
That droning blend of honey and percussion,
Partly nitro, partly glycerine. . . .
Perhaps there is some kind of parallel
Between him and us all. Oh, I don't know—
Analogy's a little silver fish
That slips too easily through the net of words.

And so you'll hear no more of Toulemonde
Who made himself a motley to the view.
He's safe, he's safe in silence; and the film,
The brittle hurrying ribbon of his thought
That carried in its sentient gelatine
All sunlights and all darknesses he knew,
Is safe in acid, in the ruddy gloom—
Such colour as the curtained bee would know
Drowned in the bedstead of a crimson rose,
Such colour as the vineyard speck might swim
Deepened in the full Burgundian glass,
Such colour as the unborn Juliet felt
Nursed in the reddest vein of Shakespeare's heart.

Cold acid and warm colour keep him safe,
He need not fear the White Light of the World.

He had no pride, you say. No, merely wished
To do what even God can hardly do,
Put two and two together and make three.
The alternative to love, he once remarked,
Is never hatred; no, but more love still.
It can't be proved, and so—
X marks the spot
Where he heard chipmunks dancing in the wall.

VI

LADY MACBETH

Nature plays Dame Macbeth. She drowns the days
In burly slumber, in a booze of sun,
Brimming the hollows with her golden drug
And all the while sets on, in prickling night,
The murderer with moonlight on his blade.
Here where you drowse among these amber thickets
The gouts of blood are sprinkled in the brush
Where wounded summer crept away to die.

Beneath the gorgeous robe, the sweet accost,
Beneath the silk and scarlet of November

She masquerades the traitor in the hostess
And, ladylike, wears her most Persian colours
For bedtime and the boudoir. Women all
Raiment themselves most brightly for the dark
Which is, on information and belief,
Their true dominion. So she plays the rôle,
Behind her ruddy arras clink of steel,
The tread of feet, the uneasy nightmare cry,
And in her double bosom, warm as milk,
She hides the sudden dagger of the frost.

Yet now, of all those stabbed and murdered hours
We have one token, emblem, microcosm—
Months of summer, packed and coiled and crisped
In the chrysanthemum's bitter knot of curls.
Oh curly heads! While I was laughing, loafing,
Loving, cursing, sleeping, praying, drugging
With such poor anodynes as I could find
(The beach of Lido or the beach of Lethe)
They drank the season in: the humming ether
Of tense July, the lubber barroom bees,
The ticking of unanswerable woodland
Lavender and livid with the moon.
An almanac of all the summer's pride:
What schooling theirs, meridian's docile pupils—
Colour and wealth from our good Lord the Sun
Gilding early dazzles of the air.
Like young green monks they dipped their pens
in or,

Took the text, disputed not the doctrine,
And how shall I construe their curlicues
Script in some gaudy vulgate of their own?
Darkness, rain and blaze, blaze, rain and darkness,
They abode their cycle. So did I.
They kept their own counsel. So will I.
They brought forth their beauty. So must I.
But thinking of those days and what they meant,
Their close and angry savour, I guess well
Just why these autumn blazons are so fair,
Red seal and probate on the summer's will.

There was a green light once on lawn and glade,
The kind of green that dwells on second acts
Of Shakespeare's forest fancies. Far above,
The cloud-capped pinnacles, the gorgeous towers
Swimming, lifting in warm gauzy shine.
Then best he realized how very helpless
He was in the slick world. "Helpless indeed,
I've not read Shakespeare, even." It was queer,
His mind ran much on Shakespeare, whom he
knew
By divination mostly: and I felt
How well the two would have got on together.

There was a day, a dull moist hazy day
When walking very lonely on a road
He found an old moss-mottled cross of stone.
It said: O CRUX, AVE SPES UNICA.

He paused and looked and wondered to himself;
Said to himself, I wonder if that's true?
Is that the only hope? Perhaps it's so
Because it is the one that none embraces
Until he's tried all else.
And as he thought
His little secret notions, all the while
Those enamelled cherubs in the garden,
Those tight green buds, round pellets of October,
Absorbed the afternoon and asked no question.

So it is strange, this instinct that we have
To hurry on through Time, push Time behind us
And get on to the Next Thing—which might be
No Time at all, or else a change of pace,
Some relativity more in proportion
To our poor need. I wonder, does it mean
We guess some infinite reintegration?
Yet I'm not keen to have life over with
Until I solve the mere technique of living,
Compose that conflict of necessities
The conscious and unconscious. When to swim,
When merely to be carried by the stream?
(This was Toulemonde in Wordsworth vein.)
For there are some who know, the gifted some—
Have nickels in their pockets for the subway,
Can find a taxi on a rainy night,
Make grass and flowers grow, hire able service,
Rest softly without gluttony of sleep,

Be well yet inconspicuously clad,
Greet their acquaintance and pass shrewdly on
Not netted in arrears of conversation,
Tell all the pretty fibs of daily rote,
Can worship yet be proud. These have the art,
These, adequately mad, without surrender
To rhetoric and greed. They love the world,
Their lives are harmony.

And so I watch the year play Dame Macbeth
And I the pallid partner of her plan:
Summer I loved, my kingdom and my king
Stabbed in his sleep and crept away to die.

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